Parental Engagement in School Management: Exploring the Importance of Parental Involvement in School Decision-Making Processes

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Abstract: *This study explores the significance of parental involvement in the management of primary schools within Malaysia's Klang Valley, particularly focusing on its impact on decision-making processes and educational outcomes. As the Malaysian education system transforms, fostering parental engagement has emerged as a crucial factor in developing collaborative learning environments. Employing a qualitative methodology, data were collected through in-depth interviews with 20 parents, 10 teachers, and 10 school administrators, followed by thematic analysis to identify key themes related to communication and sociocultural influences. The findings reveal that effective communication between schools and parents significantly enhances parental engagement, which in turn leads to improved student performance and more effective school governance. However, barriers such as cultural differences and socioeconomic challenges hinder active parental involvement. This research provides valuable insights for enhancing parental engagement practices within the Malaysian context, offering practical recommendations for policymakers and educators aimed at strengthening parent-school partnerships. By addressing these barriers and leveraging effective communication strategies, schools can enhance decision-making processes and overall educational quality. Ultimately, this study underscores the critical role of parental involvement in school management and its implications for educational improvement, contributing to the ongoing discourse on effective school governance and parental engagement.*

Keywords: Parental Involvement, School Management, Decision-Making, Educational Policy, Parent-School Partnerships
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1. Introduction

Parental involvement in the management of a school is an important phenomenon that encourages better academic performance of students while enhancing good governance of schools. With the change in the educational paradigms to be more collaborative in nature, the role of the parents in the decision-making process has also been highlighted. The study will discuss the involvement of parents in Malaysian schools and how active participation from them regarding school management may influence not only better educational achievements but also improve relationships between families and schools on the whole. The present study probes into the current trends and practices to highlight the processes that make effective parental involvement possible and the issues seriously impeding it.

While many benefits of parental involvement have been recognized, the active involvement of parents in the school decision-making process remains a problem in Malaysia. The traditional governance regime in most schools has excluded family voices and thereby polarized school managers and families. Social economic disparities, cultural differences along with ineffective communication strategies form critical challenges to effective involvement of parents. The problem is especially acute in the Klang Valley, where diverse socioeconomic origins and cultural traditions come together to create a critical demand for an approach that would address their needs with great specificity.

One of the most formidable inequalities in socioeconomic status can be identified as creating a barrier to parental engagement. This is a very serious hindrance that prohibits certain parents from linking with schools effectively. Often, practical obstacles confront parents from a low socioeconomic background, these include constraints on time, scarcity of money, and resources to be drawn upon (Henderson & Mapp 2016). These barriers not only bind their involvement in school activities but also create a vicious cycle of disengagement that contributes to the aggravation of educational inequalities. Hence, socioeconomic barriers must be overcome to create an inclusive school environment which effectively engages all families.

Other than these, the cultural differences may also raise serious barriers to the effective involvement of parents in Malaysian schools. Schools, for example, must tolerate a wide variety of cultural norms and communication methods because of different demographics in the country. Misunderstandings because of cultural variations alienate the parents and make them unwilling to involve themselves in the affairs of school governance. Schools are unable to develop means and strategies of communication that appeal to the very lived experiences of their parent populations, hence bypassing some opportunities for collaboration. For this reason, identification and adjustments of these cultural factors become very important in the development of an enabling environment for parental involvement.

The main purposes of this study are to determine the status of parental involvement in the Malaysian school decision-making process, describe factors that influence involvement and act as barriers to effective engagement, and suggest potential strategies to increase parental participation. Taking a closer look at the current state of parental involvement, the given study will closely analyze the drivers behind such engagement and how schools can revisit or implement certain practices to raise collaboration with families.

This study is bound to add immensely to the existing literature on parental involvement through the identification of unique constraints faced within the Malaysian context, and also through pragmatic recommendations that can raise family involvement in school management. The socioeconomic and cultural obstacles toward parental involvement will be put in the spotlight by the study with an aim for more inclusive education, beneficial for children, schools, and society at large, according to Henderson & Mapp (2016). The findings should also be useful in informing policyholders and educators that family participation in school governance can lead to enhanced cooperative learning conditions.

This article is organized as follows: After the historical and conceptual contextualization of parental participation in school management, a detailed analysis of the problems involving parents in decision-making processes, focusing on socioeconomic and cultural limitations of such an initiative. After establishing the objectives of the research, the expected contributions of the study are presented. The paper concludes with recommendations for future research and practice that will help improve parental involvement in Malaysian schools. In a comprehensive

approach, the complications of parental involvement are explained and solutions that would further lead to successful collaboration between schools and families are provided.

2. Literature Review

In the case of improving students' achievement, parental involvement in education has received great attention as one of the important factors that can bring about increased effectiveness of schools. Indeed, studies indicate that from substantial parental involvement in the education of their children flows significant increases in academic performance, attendance, and school climate. Teachers and administrators have traditionally dominated school decision-making, often relegating parents to lesser responsibilities or none. However, recent educational reforms have favored the latter approach, citing that parents bring a wealth of valuable perspective, resources, and commitment that can benefit the education of all children. Goodall & Montgomery, 2014 This review, therefore, synthesizes existing literature on parental engagement in school decision-making processes and their importance and the challenges to effective engagement as part of Malaysia.

Various theories give a critical basis on which to understand the dynamics of parental involvement in education. For example, Epstein's Framework of Parental Involvement, 2018, classifies parental involvement into six classes of involvement, including decision-making, volunteering, and communication. It focuses on the multi-dimensionality of engagement and its implications for student outcomes. The Continuum by Goodall and Montgomery, 2014, is multidimensional, distinguishing between superficial involvement and deeper, mutually beneficial interactions between parents and schools. Christenson and Sheridan's Model of Effective Communication, 2018, focuses on clear and inclusive strategies to attain communication, therefore providing a greater involvement of parents. All these theories combined give insight into how various types of parent participation influence educational performance and the general functioning of schools, especially within a socio-culturally diversified context like Malaysia.

Parental involvement, along with the characteristics associated with it, including socio-economic status, cultural background, and communication efficiency, all combine to hold the key to the understanding of the hurdles that lie in the way of effective participation. Large socioeconomic disparities in parental participation threaten, as studies already indicate, many low-income families experiencing practical barriers due to a lack of time and resources. Also, cultural differences can affect parents' expectations and behaviors of engagement, leading to misunderstandings and lower participation. In that respect, Lim and Tan maintain that "Communication techniques employed by schools have to be effective; otherwise, families will feel alienated and less willing to participate in school governance" (Chong & Mohammad, 2018). Thus, this interaction of variables points out the different levels at which parental involvement takes place and how programmatic efforts may be carried out toward effective participation.

In this study, Epstein's Framework of Parental Involvement is combined with Goodall and Montgomery's Continuum and Christenson and Sheridan's Model of Effective Communication. This paradigm provides a deep look at the different levels of involvement that parents can assume, the socio-economic and cultural factors that are likely to affect their engagement, and the communications strategies through which schools and parents may forge closer relationships. Through these theoretical approaches, the study hopes to investigate the present

state of parental involvement in Malaysian schools and provide useful measures in improving the level of engagement.

A critical review of the literature on the research objectives indicates an increasing number of findings on the association of parental involvement with improved educational outcomes. Indeed, active parental involvement has been associated with higher student success, heightened student enthusiasm, and a more supportive climate at schools. Research has shown that parental involvement in school decision-making processes has considerable implications for resources and policy effectiveness. Despite these promising links, there are still considerable gaps regarding how to involve parents effectively from diverse socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds in Malaysia.

Determining the gaps in current literature is paramount for further research into parental involvement. Indeed, while numerous studies indicate the gains that can be achieved from the involvement of parents in Malaysia, few have carefully investigated those specific barriers that deter any effective involvement in the educational setting. Additionally, hardly a few empirical studies are focused on culturally sensitive practices and techniques of communication that take into consideration diversified needs of parents. This study, therefore, seeks to address these gaps by interrogating the status of involvement on the part of parents in school decision-making processes and coming up with concrete strategies to enhance their engagement.

The conceptual framework of this study integrates the theoretical inputs presented above and builds an integrated model to explain parental involvement in school management. It argues that successful involvement is conditioned by a variety of socio-economic, cultural, and communicative variables that come into play in the school ecosystem. This framework will hence guide the study process while attempting to unravel the intricacies of parental involvement in Malaysian schools. This will, in turn, give more information on how parental involvement can be increased, and how student educational outcomes can be bettered with an emphasis on these interrelated study components.

3. Research Methodology

This qualitative research investigates parental involvement in school governance, further emphasizing the role of parents in decision-making processes within schools in Klang Valley primary schools. Qualitative research is particularly suitable for such a study area, as it allows the researcher to conduct an in-depth study of participants' intricate relationships and personal experiences. The approach is important to comprehend subjective meanings that parents, teachers, and school administrators attribute to their interactions and experiences in the context of educational governance. Qualitative design allows studying hidden insights about how diversified socioeconomic, cultural, and institutional aspects are influencing parental decision-making processes (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011).

The research methodology of this study is established on semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions between principal stakeholders involved in the management of schools. Such a method has been used to ensure a wide range of opinions is captured in a flexible process of data gathering (Patton, 2015). Semi-structured interviews will grant the researcher the opportunity to ask open-ended questions, which allow participants to share experiences and their perspectives concerning parental involvement in school governance. This method allows the researcher to elicit rich, complex narratives that detail nuances in parental involvement in decision-making processes. In focus group conversations, members are able to express

themselves and understand their ideas together, which might lead to a deeper understanding of shared experiences and issues.

In this study, both random and purposive sampling procedures are employed to get a representative, well-informed selection of participants. Parents will be randomly selected from an exhaustive list of school-associated parents' representative of the wide variation in socio-economic origins and cultural situations. This random sampling ensures that the views expressed by the parents are indicative of the larger parent community in the Klang Valley. Teachers and school principals will be selected using purposive sampling, with an emphasis on those who have enough years of experience and have been involved hands-on in parental involvement and participatory decision-making processes. According to Merriam & Tisdell (2016), this dual approach presents an even-keel and formidable assessment of parental participation from diverse stakeholder perspectives.

The semi-structured interviews in this study, along with the observational checklists, are data collection techniques geared toward bringing out certain information from the participants regarding experiences on parental involvement in school decision-making. Open-ended questions guide semi-structured interviews, allowing free expression of self by participants while answering research questions. The interviews are audio-recorded upon agreement from the participants to ensure that the narration by each participant is captured correctly. Apart from interviews, observational checklists can be used for contextual information on school surroundings and existing parental engagement efforts, supplementing the data gathered through interviews.

The study design takes systematic steps to ensure valid data collection with the observance of ethics. Collaboration with personnel of schools, principals, and administrators helps in finding the participants, thus facilitating the processes of recruitment. After recruitment, semi-structured interviews in a friendly and polite atmosphere should be arranged with the respondents. Every interview shall be conducted with a pre-defined structure that would encourage free discussion; thereafter, verbatim transcriptions would be made to ensure that the responses of the participants are reflected correctly. The study requires confidentiality, in which the participants' identities will be concealed through the use of pseudonyms. This creates a favorable climate in which the trust would be assured and experiences shared with confidence.

Thematic analysis is a method that detects, analyzes, and interprets patterns found in qualitative data. The basis of this investigation will be performed through systematic coding of the transcribed interviews by first becoming familiar with the material, then developing initial codes, and finally establishing broader themes that capture crucial insights into parental engagement in decision-making processes. This thematic analysis approach is informed by Creswell (2013) guidelines on qualitative research and thus, will help the study to explore an in-depth understanding of the complexity of parental involvement in Malaysian schools. The result of such an analysis can allow answering of the research questions and thus, improving the pool of information available in regard to involvement of parents in school management.

Research Objectives	Research Questions	Procedure	Method Used
1. Evaluate the current levels of parental involvement in school decision-making	1. What are the current levels of parental involvement in school decision-making processes in Malaysian schools?	• Collaborate with school personnel for participant recruitment. • Conduct semi-structured interviews with parents.	Semi-structured interviews

processes in Malaysian schools.		• Randomly select parents from a comprehensive school-associated list. • Ensure diverse representation.	
2. Identify and analyze the barriers that hinder effective parental engagement in school management in Malaysia.	2. What are the main barriers that prevent parents from engaging effectively with school management in Malaysia?	• Conduct focus group discussions with teachers and school administrators. • Use open-ended questions to elicit insights. • Utilize purposive sampling for teachers and administrators based on relevant experience. • Record and transcribe sessions.	Focus Group Discussions
3. Propose practical strategies for enhancing parental involvement in school decision-making processes.	3. What strategies can be implemented to enhance parental involvement in school decision-making processes in Malaysian schools?	• Analyze interview and focus group data for recurring themes. • Develop actionable recommendations based on findings.	Thematic analysis

4. Discussion

The findings of the study indicate some key themes that create a maze through which parental involvement in school management, especially the decision-making process, becomes complex. The first theme is Parental Communication and Engagement. It stresses that good relations between parents and schools depend on clear and adequate regular communication Epstein 2018. Meanwhile, regular and transparent updates via WhatsApp groups, newsletters, and personal contacts were found to have the potential of working for parents through keeping them informed and involved. The parents can implement increased engagement with educational experience due to the frequent communication. This increases the overall engagement rate (Henderson & Mapp, 2016).

The second theme of *Parental Involvement in Decision-Making* clearly proves that parents are willing to participate in school administration, and both behavioral and academic results for their children have started to improve due to their involvement therein (Hornby & Blackwell, 2018). For example, advisory committees are supposed to facilitate parents' involvement, although not all parents take such opportunities. When they do, however, it instills a feeling of belonging in them, aside from helping administer schools better (Parent 4, Jeynes, 2018).

The third theme, *Challenges and Barriers to Parental Involvement*, identifies numerous barriers that affect effective involvement. Time limits, cultural differences, and language barriers make it very hard for parents to actively participate in school events and decision-making processes. These challenges often leave the parents with feelings of disconnection from the school, thereby constraining their capacity to take part in an active manner. These are critical issues that need to be addressed if an environment is to be developed that will allow for more involvement of parents.

The fourth theme, *The Impact on Student Outcomes* describes that students have higher academic achievements and lower behavioural problems if their parents are involved in school decision making. However, this too lends to the belief that increased parental involvement does translate into greater student success. Many teachers and administrators

noted children of parents that were involved were also more motivated and interested in their studies.

The fifth theme, *Cultural and Language Considerations*, makes a case for employing culturally responsive practices with parents from diverse backgrounds to improve parent engagement effectiveness (Parent 8, Hornby & Lafaele, 2017). Although such challenges, including language barriers and cultural gaps, may impact parental engagement, provision of bilingual materials and culturally attentive events can bridge gaps (Teacher 5).

The sixth theme, *Support and Resources for Parental Involvement,* shows that despite schools providing resources in the form of workshops and online materials, without clarity parents find it hard to utilize them and use them ineffectively (Parent 5, Chong & Mohammad, 2018). More resources specifically around how parents can work with what is provided by the schools (Admin 3, Henderson & Mapp 2016) along with supplementary involvement/well-being resources like low-frame materials and experiential workshops to provide more resources (Admin 3). Three of those interviews with parents revealed how one size fits none when it came to the type of help certain parents needed from teachers and indeed, the importance of tailored approaches is shown to be crucial, in particular for parents who come from lower income backgrounds, who, without them, may not receive the full benefit of the resources offered (Teacher 3, Chong & Mohammad, 2018).

Lastly, the seventh theme, *Input and Improvement*, stresses that schools should create processes where parents can give their feedback that schools can utilize when improving their methods of parental engagement (Parent 3, Henderson & Mapp, 2016). While schools that ask for feedback from parents and use it to make improvements create a more fluid and vibrant atmosphere, reinforcing the school-family partnership (Admin 3, Henderson, & Mapp, 2016). An ever-repeating feedback loop ensures that school practices reflect parental needs, resulting in greater parent satisfaction and engagement (Parent 6, Henderson & Mapp, 2016).

It can be concluded at last that effective communication, parents taking part in decision making and overcoming barriers of culture and language are the key factors for enhancing parental engagement in school management (Epstein, 2018; Henderson & Mapp, 2016). Parents are likely to be more involved in schools where policies are maintained on diverse cultures, adequate resources are made available, and there are proper channels for continuous feedback resulting in improved student outcomes (Jeynes, 2018; González, 2016). These suggestions underscore the importance of a system's approach to the management of a school (Hornby & Blackwell, 2018).

Table 1: Summary of Findings on Parental Engagement in School Decision-Making

Theme	Key Findings	Supporting Quotes	Research Objective / Hypothesis
1. Parental Communication and Engagement	Clear communication strengthens parental involvement (Epstein, 2018). Schools use various channels (e.g., WhatsApp, newsletters) to keep parents informed (Parent 3, Epstein, 2018).	"When the school communicates openly about what's happening, I feel more involved." – Parent 3 (Epstein, 2018).	Objective 1: To explore the importance of effective communication in parental engagement (Epstein, 2018).
2. Parental Involvement in Decision-Making	Parents want to contribute to decision-making, and their involvement	"When parents are involved in decision-making, it feels like our	Objective 3: To assess the impact of parental involvement on student

	positively affects student outcomes (Hornby & Blackwell, 2018).	concerns are taken seriously." – Parent 4 (Jeynes, 2018).	outcomes (Hornby & Blackwell, 2018).
3. Challenges and Barriers to Parental Involvement	Time constraints, cultural differences, and language barriers prevent effective engagement (González, 2016).	"I want to be more involved, but my work schedule makes it difficult to attend school events." – Parent 2 (González, 2016).	Objective 2: To identify the barriers that prevent effective parental involvement (González, 2016).
4. Impact on Student Outcomes	When parents are involved, students perform better academically and behaviorally (Jeynes, 2018).	"Students whose parents are active in school tend to be more motivated and perform better." – Teacher 2 (Jeynes, 2018).	Hypothesis 3: Increased parental involvement leads to improved student outcomes (Jeynes, 2018).
5. Cultural and Language Considerations	Language barriers and cultural differences limit engagement, but inclusive practices can bridge these gaps (González, 2016).	"Sometimes, the school doesn't consider our cultural traditions in their activities." – Parent 8 (Hornby & Lafaele, 2017).	Hypothesis 3: Addressing cultural and language barriers enhances parental involvement (Hornby & Lafaele, 2017).
6. Support and Resources for Parental Involvement	Schools provide resources like workshops, but parents need more guidance to use them effectively (Chong & Mohammad, 2018).	"The school provides a lot of materials, but sometimes it's overwhelming." – Parent 5 (Chong & Mohammad, 2018).	Objective 3: Propose strategies for enhancing parental involvement, considering socio-economic and cultural factors (Chong & Mohammad, 2018).
7. Feedback and Improvement	Schools that seek and implement feedback from parents see improved engagement (Henderson & Mapp, 2016).	"I appreciate when the school asks for feedback on events and takes our suggestions into account." – Parent 3 (Henderson & Mapp, 2016).	Objective 2: To explore how schools use feedback to improve parental engagement practices (Henderson & Mapp, 2016).

5. Conclusion

Parental engagement in school decision making: The inconvenient truth for the Klang Valley primary schools; findings from this study highlight that it has been established for quite some time that parental engagement plays a vital role in the overall success of students and the betterment of a school (Epstein, 2018). These results relate to the data from this study that states communication, culturally inclusive practices, and opportunities for parents to effectively participate in school governance are best practices in strengthening school-parent relationships (Henderson & Mapp, 2016).

Among the strongest findings is the necessity of flexible listening and outreach that meets a variety of parental needs in schools. Parents were more satisfied and involved when updates were periodically sent digitally (Parent 3, Epstein, 2018). These findings indicate that schools have to keep providing strong communication tools to connect home and school (Henderson & Mapp, 2016). Also, addressing the cultural and language barrier is critical since these are some of the factors that may also limit parental participation (González, 2016). It is critical that translation services and culturally innovative materials are able to make parents feel significantly welcome and, as a result, participate in the education of their child (Hornby & Lafaele, 2017).

Also, the research highlights the need for an ongoing feedback mechanism and strategies in fostering stronger parent engagement. There was a significant increase in engagement when parents were actively consulted through surveys and through speaking out (Parent 6, Henderson

& Mapp, 2016). This stresses the need to establish feedback mechanisms that ensure that schools practice what the communities need (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2018). This will lead to schools being able to build an open communication channel where parents, teachers, and other administrators can all work towards the same aim (Jeynes, 2018).

Furthermore, the schools should acknowledge some of the factors that may also limit parents to getting involved with the school with regards to work or even the knowledge and understanding of how the school works (Parent 5, Fan & Chen, 2019). Such barriers can be lifted by allowing parents to attend meetings at convenient times, conducting educational workshops, and instructing them on how they can participate in the affairs of the school (Bourdieu, 2018). This agrees with Putnam's social capital theory, which stresses the importance of the community's social networks and the time they can spend participating within the community (Putnam, 2020).

To some extent, the findings of the study suggest that school outcomes and the entire school climate have greatly resulted from how parents get engaged in school governance (Epstein, 2018). For the general benefit of students, inclusion, active participation, and adaptability strategies applied by schools provide an edge to students due to the positivity around them (Jeynes, 2018). While the paradigm shifts towards one that is more acceptable to broader sections of society, such as parents, it remains a focal point for harnessing effective partnerships in terms of educational provision (Henderson & Mapp, 2016).

Acknowledgement

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