

# Parental Commitment in Leading Learning of the Orang Asli Students

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DOI: 10.6007/IJARBSS/v7-i4/2889 URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v7-i4/2889>

### ABSTRACT

This research focuses on the perceptions of headmasters, teachers and parents on parental commitment in leading learning among the orang Asli students. This study was carried out in 9 primary schools which include 9 headmasters, 113 teachers and 102 parents as respondents. The data was collected by using questionnaires and was analysed by using descriptive statistics. The findings showed that all respondents agreed that the level of parental commitment was high in leading learning orang Asli students. The result of the correlation analysis between parental commitment and student achievement showed a low and negative correlation score value but is significant. These results provide indication that although parents' commitment was high but students' achievement is still very low. The implication of this study is to further investigate on factors that affect achievement. This study also suggests that motivation program for orang Asli parents need to be continued to further enhance their commitment.

Keywords: Parental commitment, Leading learning, Orang Asli, Student Achievement, Primary School

## **INTRODUCTION**

Academic excellence and dropouts among orang Asli students often get attention from the government and researchers. Report from Inspectorate (Jemaah Nazir) on 2007 (SUHAKAM, 2010) showed that, a total of 1047 orang Asli students have not mastered the reading and writing skills yet. Among the causes of this problem are lack of concern from the principals, headmasters and teachers which lead the students' being marginalized, humiliated and having inferiority complex. There are also teachers who have had to leave their classrooms and not teaching full time due to other affairs. Moreover, teaching methods that are boring and less interesting, lacking appropriate teaching materials, school resource centre with fewer books, less experienced teachers to teach Orang Asli students and too bound by syllabus and public examinations are some of the factors that lead to this problem. Besides that, there are also headmasters and teachers who are less committed and motivated. In addition, there are also many new and inexperienced teachers. The problem of lack of motivation among parents to ensure their children attending school also caused many orang Asli students drop out from schools. A study of Md Nor, Roslan, Mohamed, Abu Hassan, Mat Ali and Abdul Manaf (2011) revealed that a gap in Orang Asli students' education still exists. This problem may be caused by the way they learn which is less effective, and may also be due to getting lesser support from the headmasters, teachers and parents.

Past research has proven that 90 percent of orang Asli students failed in academic, although their school has all the necessary facilities (Talib & Muslim, 2006). This is because educational opportunities among orang Asli are still not encouraging. Only a small number of them are able to continue their studies in secondary schools and universities. It may be due; their inability to adapt with the new life style and adjust with the development and modernization (Kamarudin, 2005). This study focuses only on parents' commitments to lead their children's learning. Commitment is closely linked with emotional feelings, ideas, philosophies and values held by individualised or internalised when discharging their duties and also a collection of feelings and beliefs of its members belonging to that organisation which is jointly owned (Mowday, Porter & Steers, 1982; Kamaruddin, 2008).

Parental involvement reported much benefit not only to the students and parents but could potentially affect the commitments of teachers and school (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005) on the process of teaching and learning. According to Hendersen and Mapp (2002), several studies have found that when parents show commitment in their children's education, the students are able to obtain excellent results, pass the examinations, regular attendance at school, having good behaviour and social skills, can adapt well in school and managed to finish schooling. In addition, parents are the guardians, educators and the first person to get along with the children (Berns, 2007). Parents also emerged as in house motivators who provide continuous booster throughout children's education process, starting from their birth until adulthood.

Based on the situation explained above, parents' commitment appears to be a very important factor for achieving excellence of orang Asli schools. Positive commitments from parents appear to have strong inclination towards significant contribution to the excellence of orang Asli schools. Thus, in relating to this subject matter; four matters namely, the provision of students' education fund, providing a learning environment, communication with children as well as support and motivation for children's excellence are put into focused.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Family or parents in particular can affect the academic achievement of their children. Problematic family will certainly affect the children's education (Bahrudin, 2001). One of the effective ways of parents' involvement in children's learning is by engaging themselves in learning activities at home. Among the factors that lead to students' success are parents' high expectations on them (Jeynes, 2005). Moreover, the support and encouragement of parents towards their children somewhat help their academic excellence. According to Salleh, Kamin & Hendry (2012), parents' commitments in terms of providing educational equipment such as reference books and hiring personal tutors to teach certain subjects can help to improve their children's academic achievement. In addition, complete school equipment can cause the students to become more motivated and excited to go to school (Salleh, Kamin & Hendry, 2012; Mahyuddin & Ahmad Fahrid, 2011). Complete learning resource at home can help students to be excited and make their home as their centre of knowledge.

Matejevic, Jovanovic, and Jovanovic (2014) found that there is a significant relationship between parenting style and parental involvement in school activities as well as academic achievements of their children. Parents who have relationship with learning and academic achievement of children will be positive and be in a position to generate their children's academic excellence. Overall, the attitudes and interest of parents, parents' education as well as upbringing and parental guidance are among the elements that lead to students' excellence. The parents who are interested in their children's education in depth will give serious attention to promote their children's excellence positively (Hussin, 1996).

Based on the study that was conducted by Graves (2011), family involvement in students' academic achievement can be defined as the influence of parents in students' behavioural change beyond schooling hours or in other words the roles that could be played by parents at home greatly contribute to students' academic achievement. While Smith (2007) revealed that the parents who spend time with their children to complete school assignments lead their children to be more successful and have desires to do their best.

Besides that, the economic status of the family plays an important role in determining the success of the children in education. According to Saniman (2010), living standards or socioeconomic level of a family support the academic achievement of their children. Usually, the family which has a stable socioeconomic status will be able to encourage their children to

be successful. While the families with low socioeconomic normally will encourage their children to help to meet their needs rather than trying to improve their education. This was supported by Talib (2009) who proclaimed socioeconomic is highly correlated with parenting styles in determining children's academic achievement. Overall, socioeconomic factor will also affect students' existence in school. In addition, Payani Yanai (2007) explained that the economic, social and cultural environments affect students' dropouts from schools. Hence, the researcher suggests that efforts to enhance Orang Asli students' education should proceed in overcoming this problem.

Apart of the issues discussed above, the socioeconomic aspects also can be linked to the provision of education funds for children's learning in present and future. In other words, the provision of education funding is generally coming from savings from household income. It is essential because in present the cost of education in relative takes a large proportion from the parents' income. Thus, parents need to save money from time to time and need to spend their income wisely in the process to develop the education fund for the children. Apart from that, the financial institution will also enhance their roles and efforts in order to attract more students and parents to participate in the saving schemes that they offer. These include attractive and profitable saving packages, providing insurance protection and also dividends and incentives for students and parents based on the amount of their saving deposits. Moreover, efforts by the government through the establishment of *Permodalan Nasional Berhad* (PNB) to manage the funds of *Amanah Saham Nasional* (ASN), *Amanah Saham Bumiputera* (ASB) and the latest *Amanah Saham Wawasan 2020* (ASW 2020); which was launched by the Malaysian Prime Minister in 1999, aimed to increase savings among young generations. In addition, efforts to cultivate saving activities in the community are also intensified.

Communication in family environment plays an important role in the development process of teenagers. According to Ismail et al. (2008), with the aid of communication process in the families, teenagers could understand their functions as children, students, peers and members of the community. Therefore, they will become more responsible to themselves, family and community. This assertion is supported by Omar, Nordin, and Mustaffa (2004) who revealed that communication that does not take place in a harmonious and in an unorganised manner may lead to discipline problems. This clearly showed, positive and effective communication is important as a foundation to build identity of the family and to make decisions. Moreover, good communication between parents and children will establish love and a close relationship among family members and they could also resolve the problems well (Barnes & Olson, 1985).

In Malaysia, family communication is still following the traditional way. Father as the head of the family still has the autocratic decision making power and all family members must follow and abide by the decision made by him. This pattern is likely to be repeated as his son would follow him without being realised. This is because parents become a role model to a child without realising it. Aigner (2010) reported that perceptions of parents about communication are more open and less problematic. However, this finding is different from their children's perceptions.

One of the issues that is often discussed in education is the role of motivation in helping students' academic achievements. Therefore, the teachers always give excuses that their students do not reach the level of achievement due to lack of motivation or 'lazy'. In this context, motivation is seen as a major factor that plays an important role in determining students' academic achievements, whether in primary or secondary schools. At the same time, there are also parents who are willing to spend their own money in order to send their children to the ongoing motivation programs held by certain parties. Besides that, the parents are also willing to spend time to attend motivational courses which can help to improve academic performance together with their children. Generally, motivation is a process of intervention made by parents to encourage and improve their children's behaviour (Reber, 1987). Motivation can be divided into two – intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Woolfolk, 1995). Intrinsic motivation is the inner spirit of the individual to achieve goals based on one's own interests and capabilities. This confidence will encourage individuals to strive for success. Whereas, extrinsic motivation requires external incentives such as rewards for achieving goals. Another researcher, Catsambis (1998) in his study found that parents who have high expectations on their children's success in education tend to boost the motivation of their children to be more successful. With that, parents and children have certain inspirations where parents become effective agents of environmental influence to affect students' behavioural change. In addition, it is also supported by the ideals and visions of the future that is applied in students' hearts (Kerpelman, Kismet & Stephens, 2008).

Besides that, parents can also function as teachers by carrying out cognitive activities at home (Shaverand & Walls, 1998; Epstein, Sanders, Simon, Salinas, Janson & Van Voorhis, 2009; Jordan, Snow & Porche, 2000). Parental involvement should be continuous from preschool to secondary school or until they can be independent (Green et al., 2007). Nonetheless, parents also need to spend enough time with their children in assisting them to complete their homework and assignments (Thorkildsen & Stein, 1998), so that the children can make at their best. Generally, at home, parents become mentors to children. In other word, children need parental involvement in all aspects of life to improve their self-motivation and determination in order to meet their expectations.

There are studies with findings that show parental involvement is not limited only in school, but parents need to be also involved in their children's education at home too (Shaverand & Walls, 1998; Miedel & Reynolds, 1999). Continuous active participation of parents both at home and school will definitely affect children's academic achievements (Keith & Litchman, 1994; Miedel & Reynolds, 1999; Shaverand & Walls, 1998). According to the researchers; parents especially the working parents, do not pay attention on their children's education. They always give excuses such as coming back home late after work and also work pressure that makes them unable to spend time with their children. Therefore, the parents let their children without any supervision and they are also not showing any interest on their children's educational attainment.

Other than parents, the roles performed by each member of the family do have effect a children's learning and academic achievements. Family context which is conducive and positive plays dominant role in generating academic excellence of the children (Zakaria & Mohd Saleh,

2011). It is because positive family relationships develop students with good characters and later on help to excel in academic. This finding is supported by Za'aba (1992) who asserted that children will be virtuous with noble behaviours and good manners if they have enough care from their parents and also other family members. The establishment of strong family structure contributes to a positive socio-cultural experience that leads to academic excellence. According to Berns (2007), *'the family functions as a system of interaction and the way it conducts personal relationship has a very powerful effect on the psychosocial development of children.'* (p. 53).

In a nutshell, parents who have a close contact with school will be able to help their children's education better because they are more capable to understand their children's educational development. The close involvement between school and parents is also highlighted in Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025 (Ministry of Education, 2012). Moreover, active parents not only become partners of the school, but also able to help their children to complete their school assignments and at the same time ensure their children regularly attend the school. This will help schools to overcome the discipline problems, truancy and dropouts among students.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

A total of 9 headmasters, 113 teachers and 102 parents from 9 orang Asli schools participated in this study. The questionnaire on parents' commitments is measured by 20 items which was divided into four constructs namely; student's education funding, provision of learning environment, communication with children and support and motivation for child's excellence. The five-point Likert scale (1= Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Slightly Disagree, 4= Agree and 5= Strongly Agree) was used to measure the factors of parents' commitments. From the results, it is noted that the Cronbach's Alpha scores for all the constructs are exceeding 0.9 and qualify reliability. Thus, it is understandable that all the variables that were tested in this study are very reliable. Moreover, the reliability is also consistent for all three questionnaires that were used (headmaster, teacher, and parents).

## **FINDINGS**

In headmasters' point of view, parents overall commitment score value is  $M=3.56$ . "Student's education funding" recorded the highest mean scores ( $M=3.69$ ), followed by "Provision of learning environment" and "Support and motivation for child's excellence" which both respectively recorded  $M=3.56$ . Meanwhile, "Communication with children" recorded the least mean scores ( $M=3.42$ ). The item "My student has a savings account in bank" yielded the highest mean scores ( $M=4.00$ ). While, the item "My student has sufficient reference books" marked the lowest mean scores ( $M=3.22$ ).

Overall teachers' perceptions on parents' commitment is moderate ( $M=3.32$ ). The highest factor is "Student's education funding" ( $M=3.49$ ), followed by "Communication with children" and "Provision of learning environment" respectively recorded  $M=3.24$ . Finally, "Support and motivation for child's excellence" recorded  $M=3.20$ . The item "My student has a savings

account in bank” yielded the highest mean scores (M=3.61; SD=0.807) while the item with least mean score is “Parents provide guidance/ tuition classes for their children” (M=3.04).

In parents’ perceptions, “Parents’ commitment” recorded the highest mean scores (M=3.92). The highest factor is “Communication with children” (M=3.99), “Student’s education funding” (M=3.88), “Support and motivation for child’s excellence” (M=3.87) and “Provision of learning environment” (M=3.84). The item that yielded the highest mean score is “I praise and give excitement to my children” (M=4.13) while the least mean score recorded by “I am saving for my children since they were babies” (M=3.59).

**Table 1: Parents Commitment Factors Perceived by Headmasters, Teachers, and Parents**

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Headmasters</b>	<b>Teachers</b>	<b>Parents</b>
<b>Parents’ Commitment Factors</b>	<b>3.56</b>	<b>3.32</b>	<b>3.92</b>
<b>Student’s Education Funding</b>	<b>3.69</b>	<b>3.49</b>	<b>3.88</b>
Parents save a part of their income for students/ children	3.67	3.55	3.68
Parents use the funds well.	3.89	3.60	4.11
My student/child has a savings account in bank.	4.00	3.61	3.82
Parents willingly incur expenses for student/ children.	3.56	3.60	3.92
Parents are saving for their children since they were babies.	3.33	3.07	3.59
<b>Provision of Learning Environment</b>	<b>3.56</b>	<b>3.24</b>	<b>3.84</b>
Parents provide space for their children to study at home.	3.44	3.27	3.86
Parents ensure that their children follow the study timetable to learn at home	3.56	3.17	3.74
Parents reduce noise interference from radio/ television while their children are studying.	3.67	3.29	4.03
Parents ensure that their children’s learning place is neat and clean.	3.89	3.25	3.95
My student/ child has sufficient reference books.	3.22	3.20	3.64
<b>Communication with Children</b>	<b>3.42</b>	<b>3.34</b>	<b>3.99</b>
Parents and children always talk about lessons.	3.44	3.20	3.93
Parents listen to their children when they are talking about events that happened in school.	3.33	3.50	3.98
Parents get to know about their children’s homework that given by the teachers.	3.33	3.33	4.07
Parents get to know about their children’s activities in school.	3.67	3.43	4.12
Parents can exchange ideas with children on lessons	3.33	3.26	3.89

Factors	Headmasters	Teachers	Parents
and current issues.			
<b>Support and Motivation for Child's Excellence</b>	<b>3.56</b>	<b>3.20</b>	<b>3.87</b>
Parents praise and give excitement to their children.	3.67	3.34	4.13
Parents always give encouragement and motivation to their children.	3.67	3.35	4.12
Parents always conduct reading activities with their children.	3.56	3.09	3.74
Parents guide their children on their homework.	3.44	3.17	3.94
Parents provide guidance/ tuition classes for their children.	3.44	3.04	3.43

1.0-2.33=low; 2.34-3.66=moderate; 3.67-5.00 =high

The overall results are as shown in Table 2. Parents has documented the highest mean score value (M=392) related to the perception on giving commitments towards the children compared to the headmasters' and teachers' mean scores. Parents' communication with children was the most emphasized aspect, while headmasters and teachers emphasize on Provision of Education Fund; while the least mean score values (M=3.24 and M=3.26) are documented in teachers' perception of parents commitments in Provision of Learning Environment and also in Support and Motivation for Child's Excellence.

**Table 2: Overall Comparison on Factors of Parents' Commitments Perceived by Headmasters, Teachers, and Parents**

Factors	Headmasters	Teachers	Parents
<b>Parents' Commitments</b>	<b>3.56</b>	<b>3.33</b>	<b>3.92</b>
<i>Student's Education Funding</i>	3.69	3.49	3.88
<i>Provision of Learning Environment</i>	3.56	3.24	3.84
<i>Communication with Children</i>	3.42	3.34	3.99
<i>Support and Motivation for Child's Excellence</i>	3.56	3.26	3.87

1.0-2.33=low; 2.34-3.66=moderate; 3.67-5.00 =high

In parents' perceptions, although the relationship between parents' commitments and academic achievement showed a significant correlation but it was quite weak. Moreover, there is also an inverse relationship between commitments and academic achievements ( $r=.209$ ;  $p=.035$ ). This showed that although the parents have high perceptions on commitment but it could not really help with their children's academic achievement. Despite this aspect, other factors also should be reviewed in order to know the actual reason why the orang Asli students still did not show high achievement in academic. At the same time, it is also noted that most of



the parents (63.7%) who were the respondents of this study only attained or completed primary level education.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

The results revealed, all respondents showed high perceptions on commitments that is given by the parents in order to encourage their children's learning. In providing learning environment, all respondents recorded high mean scores. However, the latter finding appear to contradict with Ahmad and Mohd Jelas's (2009) findings. Their study proclaimed most of the houses in orang Asli settlement have only one room and there are also houses with no rooms. So, they have no choices but have to do all the activities such as eating, sleeping even learning at the Rabahi, M., Yusof, H. & Awangeven when parents did not provide study tables for their children ..." (Rabahi, Yusof & Awang, 2015; p.101).

The findings also showed that the commitment of parents in providing funds for students is relatively high. Even so, a total of 88.5% of the respondents in this study are considered poor as their monthly income is less than RM3000. In other word, the situation of poverty is still plaguing until now among orang Asli community. The study by Colin (2006) supported this, where poverty led a number of orang Asli students left behind in education.

Despite this, communication with children is the highest commitment from the parents' perceptions. Good communication between parents and children, peaceful family atmosphere and some good authoritative upbringing features are important to produce teenagers with positive behaviours (Clark & Sheilds, 1997). Wintre and Sugar (2000) who put focus on the same subject matter found that family integration such as good communication is closely related to social competitiveness among teenagers. This finding is also in line with Othman and Kairollah (2013) who agreed that communication aspect is very important in family relationships.

The parents' involvement in children's education refers to the roles played by parents in their children's learning process; at home or at school. At the same time, parents can also play their roles in other activities such as attending the events and programmes at school or helping teachers with their teaching preparations. (Christenson, et al., 1992; Epstein et al., 2009). Support and motivation for children's excellence is meaningful for them if their family engage and play roles in achieving success. In a nutshell, parents are in the position to boost their children especially engaging themselves with their children in learning activities such as reading together, guiding in homework or send them to extra classes. In addition, orang Asli parents should also give an opportunity to their children to improve their living standards even though they are illiterate. Overall, this study suggests that in order to know the importance of education among orang Asli students, the mothers of the students should be given proper guidance and motivation. According to Edo (2012, in Rabahi, Yusof & Awang, 2015) the education of orang asli could be improved through strengthening their self-concept. At the same time, the school also need to involve parents in total in all the school programmes so that they can track their children's academic progress directly.

## Acknowledgement

Special thanks to Ministry of Higher Education for funding this study.

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