PARENTS' INVOLVEMENT IN MALAYSIAN AUTONOMOUS SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

One of the fundamental aspects underlying the implementation of the autonomous schools in Malaysia is the School-Based Management (SBM) practices. Previous studies indicated that SBM is viewed as a means of incorporating the voices of parents, teachers and the community in the school management in a formal manner. Thus, the aim of this study is to investigate the level of parents' involvement in Malaysian autonomous school activities as perceived by teachers. The data for the study was obtained using questionnaire from 60 autonomous schools in Malaysia. A set of questionnaire consisting 20 items using the 10 Likert scales were answered by 788 respondents (teachers of autonomous schools).   The findings shows that parents are among the stakeholders of Malaysian autonomous schools who are involved in the process of school policy-making and their involvement is relatively high in all school activities, where they always provide moral and material support to the schools; showing concern towards their children's learning process and school improvement in general; cooperating with schools to improve students' discipline and; attending periodical parent-teacher meetings. Furthermore, the findings also show that there is a pattern of parents' involvement in each activity according to varies categories and types of autonomous schools. While, the MANOVA analysis reveals that there is a significant differences among the autonomous schools in the level of parents' involvement regardless of their types and categories. Thus, the findings verify that the parents' involvement in autonomous school activities is in line with the tenet of SBM which highlights parents' roles in improving the function of the school as crucial education provider.

Keywords: Parents' involvement, School-based management, Malaysian autonomous schools.
JEL Codes: C11, J12

INTRODUCTION

Schooling is viewed as a prominent agent in instilling noble motives and aspirations to generate desired behaviours amongst the younger generation in every country (Fagerlind and Saha, 1983). This role is carried out and implemented through providing the necessary education in developing students from the cognitive, affective and psychomotor aspects. Nevertheless, such responsibilities cannot be implemented in a wholesome manner without the support from communities, especially parents. This is because parents are the closest individuals and have better understanding on students' needs and behaviour. Previous researches have revealed that a good collaboration between school and parents are able to enhance the school effectiveness.

Background of the Study

French and Bell (1984) remarked that school are considered as an open system which receives influence from its surrounding. Therefore, a school must not be isolated but should be an institution which receives consistent assistance and support from external parties, especially from parents whom are able to provide support and cooperation in ensuring its' success (Ramaiah, 1990). According to Frank (2007), existing theories in social development and school administration suggested that a community is a place where individuals construct respective identities, and it is crucial for a school to form partnership with its community to improve educational effectiveness. However, the current educational policies have forced schools to compete against each other for survival in the community. A study by Frank (2007) found that there is an existence of tension between schools and their community. This competition has compelled schools to try various means to promote their image in order to attract students. Thus, it drove schools to change from a detached approach towards the community to a body that values a productive and meaningful collaboration (Frank, 2007).

Upon realizing such importance, the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) was introduced in Malaysia and its roles are being enforced by the Malaysia Education Act, 1996 (Malaysia., 1996). The objectives of the PTA establishment in Malaysian school are as follows:

a) To establish a platform for forums and services for students' welfare and progression in schools in order to uplifting the school's image.

b) To assist and enhance the school's effort in meeting students' material needs and requests in carrying out their school activities.

c) To enable parents and teachers to exchange their opinions and relevant information pertaining to education issues.

d) To provide opportunities to parents and teachers in discussing and negotiating on efforts of improving their children's education standard.

e) To enable parents and teachers to increase the school's financial allocation and improving the physical commodities that enhances the teaching and learning process.

(Source: (Malaysia., 1996)

Parents' involvement in their children's education implies the initiatives they take to be actively involved in their children's development matters; or their efforts to understand programs that are being carried out in school or care centres; participating in activities held by the schools; and attending events organized by the schools. In this case, parents' cooperation in schools' or care centres' programs are much required. This is because the roles of parents are crucial in propelling their children's excellence, as well as enhancing schools' achievements (Mohammed *et al.*, 2005; Othman and Normalina, 2011).

School Based Management and Parents' Involvement

In order to provide quality education to all, the Ministry of Education of Malaysia (MoE) has revitalized the school management system by introducing the concept of school based management (SBM) in autonomous schools. A few schools have been selected as autonomous schools and acquired certain level of autonomy practices in managing their organizations.

The concept of school based management in Malaysian schools was initiated with the implementation of the Educational Development Master Plan (EDMP) 2006-2010 on 16 January 2006 which aim to provide quality education for the Malaysians. In this plan, cluster schools were introduced; these schools are the selected potential schools with excellence in their cluster and fulfil the prerequisites set by the MoE. In the selection process, schools were assessed and evaluated based on their excellence in respective clusters, as follows:

- Primary Schools: National Schools (SK), Chinese National Type Schools (SJKC), Tamil National Type Schools (SJKT) and the Indigenous Schools.
- Secondary Schools: Fully Residential School (SBP), Technical Secondary Schools (SMT), National Religious Secondary Schools (SMKA), Daily Secondary Schools, Premier Schools, Centennial Schools, Schools in Putrajaya and Cyberjaya and Special Model Schools.
- Special Education Primary Schools, Special Education Secondary Schools, and Special Vocational Education Secondary Schools.
- International Schools and Private Schools
- Matriculation Colleges and Institutes for Teachers Education.
(Ministry of Education., 2006)

The SBM concept was then expanded with the establishment of High Performance School – HPS under the National Key Research Area (NKRA) of education under 10th Malaysian Plan. Both types of schools (cluster school and HPS) will be referred to as autonomous schools in this article. Aforesaid, one of the fundamental aspects underlying the implementation of the autonomous schools in Malaysia is the school-based management practices. In this practice, autonomous schools are acquired more authority in administrative procedures, from human resource to assets management, funds and student intake (Ministry of Education., 2006; PEMANDU., 2010). (Caldwell, 2005) defined school-based management as:

".. the systematic decentralisation to the school level of authority and responsibility to make decisions on significant matters related to school operations within a centrally determined framework of goals, policies, curriculum, standards and accountability".

Based on the definition, SBM can be very closely related to the decentralisation of power from central to school authorities in decision making. This is to ensure that all decisions made are focused towards achieving the vision and mission of the Malaysian education system. Pertaining to this, Walker (2012) proclaimed that educational improvement is only possible if those closest to the point at which decisions are enacted become the architects of these decisions. While Caldwell (2005), Dykstra and Kucita (2008), Kumar and Khadir (2012) highlighted that decentralisation gives schools more power in decision making and has proven to impart a positive impact in improving schools performance and effectiveness In fact, the objectives of implementing SBM are as follows:

(i)   To enhance parents' and communities' participation in schools management and administration.
(ii) To heighten principal's and teachers' empowerment.
(iii) To build local capacities.
(iv) To enhance the quality and efficiency of schools that directly improves students' performances. (World Bank., 2008)

Previous studies indicated that SBM is viewed as a means to incorporate the voices of parents, teachers and the community in the management of their schools in a formal manner. Gamage (2003), suggested from his findings that when compared with what schools experienced under centralised bureaucratic models, school-based management has created more autonomous, flexibility, better quality, effective schools, accountable not only to the management system, but also to school communities.

Although the forms and methods of SBM was practiced are varies, but the main objective is to shift authorities from a hierarchical centralized management to administrative groups (e.g. parents and teachers) who are closely related to schools. Unlike most Western countries such as UK and US which permit parents to get involved in school running by school governance body (Hiatte, 1994), Gillard (2011) the rigidity of top-down school administration system in Malaysia became a major constraint for parents to air their thoughts or ideas as well as be one of the important party in school management affairs.

Thus, the implementation of SBM brings changes in the roles of several parties in the schools, especially to the principal, teachers, parents and students. For a example, the principal's role shifts into 3 basic forms: a) distributing leadership responsibilities and developing collaborative decision-making processes b) enabling and supporting teachers' success through a democratic, participative

and consultative management styles, and c) broadening the school communities through expanding networking and public relation activities with external constituents and cooperating with the school boards and the parents.

Along with the changes, SBM has granted more opportunities for parents to collaborate with schools. The findings of Koross *et al.* (2009), and Ishabangu (2012) indicated that parental participation have a positive impacts on the teaching and learning process when there is an active and frequent contacts between parents and school administration in improving school's financial accountability. While, a study by Skullerud (2011) concerning the directions and strengths of the relationship between school reputation, parent satisfaction and parents' loyalty found that parents' satisfaction significantly affects all dimensions of reputation. Whereas a study by Eyal (2008) revealed that parents with cultural capital know the "rules of the game" and can therefore take advantage of network opportunities to ensure the school's survival.

SBM also helps to improve the principals' and parents' as well as students' work satisfaction because it possess a high potency which provides space to teachers, parents and occasionally, to community members or students to express themselves in the schools' decision making processes. The parties involved in the SBM perceived their schools to be more responsible as they now have the ability to adapt resources and disposition to cater students' needs. The SBM adherent believes that this process provides a flexible structure that counteracts with the communities' unique personality.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are:

a) to measure the level of parents' involvement in the schools' policy constitution.
b) to measure level of parents' involvement in matters concerning the school.
c) to identify the significant differences on the level of parents involvement in school matters among various categories of autonomous schools.
d) to identify the significant differences on the level of parents' involvement in school matters among various types of autonomous schools.

METHODOLOGY

Data for this research were gathered using a set of questionnaires to indicate the level of stakeholders' involvement in management system of Malaysian autonomous schools from 788 teachers from 7 schools. These schools were classified in 3 categories namely, high performing schools (HPS), cluster school-cohort 1 and 2. While, the respondents for this study were those teachers had served more than 3 years in respective autonomous schools. They were selected using random sampling method. Table 1 shows the respondents' distribution. The data was then analysed

using descriptive statistics to measure the level of parents' involvement in activities related to schools. While, MANOVA analysis method was used to examine the differences of parents' involvement in activities according to types and categories of the schools.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Parents' Level of Involvement in the Schools' Policy Constitution Process

According to the concept of SBM, parents are among the most important parties that possess the jurisdiction in management and administrative processes in Malaysia's autonomous schools. In this research, the respondents are requested to mark the level of influence from the listed parties in the schools' policy constitution process in their respective schools. Table 2 shows the mean value of the stakeholders' involvement in autonomous schools. As indicated in Table 2, the level of parents' involvement in the schools' policy constitution process are high (mean=7.02), subsequently to Ministry of Education (mean=9.13), and school administrators (mean=9.00).

Parents' Involvement in School Related Activities

The respondents were asked to evaluate the level of parents' and PTA's involvement in their school's activities. Table 3 shows the mean values for parents' involvement in school's activities. The findings in Table 3 revealed that the mean value of parents' involvement level in each school activities is relatively high with a mean value between 7.19- 7.76. The highest level of parents' involvement is in the act of "supporting school activities" (mean=7.76), followed by "always contacting schools, inquiring issues concerning their' children's academic performance" (mean=7.58). The least involvement is in the act of "frequent attendance to parent teacher meeting" (mean=7.19).

The Difference of Parents' Involvement in the Activities According to the Types of Autonomous Schools

The mean distribution in Table 4 shows that there is a pattern in parents' involvement in school activities in all seven types of autonomous schools. In general, the research findings shows that the highest value of parents' involvement is the activity of Parti 2 "always contacting schools, inquiring issues concerning their' children's academic performance" (mean=7.76), whereas the lowest mean value is for the activity from Parti 3 "concerned towards school's development" (mean=7.19).

The findings also shows that the highest mean value of parents' involvement in SJK(T) schools are in almost every schools' activities except Parti 4 and 5. For these two activities, the mean value of parents' involvement in SMKA is the highest compared to other types of autonomous schools. Nevertheless, SJK(C) shows a low yet consistent mean value for parents' involvement in the listed schools' activities. Meanwhile, the MANOVA analysis shows the Wilks' Lambda value of .867, *F*

value = 3.13, $p < .001$. This findings denotes that there is a significant differences among the autonomous schools in terms of parents' involvement in school activities.

The Difference of the Level of Parents' Involvement According to Autonomous School Categories

The mean distribution in Table 5 shows a pattern of level of parents' involvement in schools activities in the 3 autonomous schools' categories. The research findings revealed that the level of parents' involvement are the highest for Parti 2 (mean=7.76), and the lowest is for Parti 3 (mean=7.19). Besides, the mean distribution also shows the highest mean value for parents' involvement in HPS category is almost in all activities, except Parti 4. The activity of Parti 4 shows the highest mean value of cohort 1 category compared to other categories. In addition, Cohort 2 shows the lowest yet consistent mean value for parents' involvement in the listed school activities.

Meanwhile, the MANOVA analysis produce Wilks' Lambda value of .918, (F value= 5.675, $p < .001$). This finding confirms that there are significant differences among the three categories in parents' level of involvement in schools activities.

DISCUSSION

The school based management implemented in Malaysia's autonomous schools aims to propel the school's excellence. According to Caldwell (2005), SBM allows individuals who are closely related to the school, including parents, to collaborate and be involved in the decision making process that can enable schools to attain their reputations. According to research findings, parents' involvement in the process of school's policy constitution is high, followed after by the Ministry of Education and the school administrators. This finding affirms that parents possess the jurisdiction in the school's policy constitution; nevertheless, the Ministry of Education still has a higher influence over the school's policy. These findings, therefore, support the Cabinet Report 1979 which proclaimed that bureaucracy is still required in Malaysian schools for unity purposes (Malaysia., 1979).

The findings also show that the mean values of parents' involvement that is inclined to a high level, between 7.19 to 7.76 in all the listed school activities. This reveals that there is a collaboration existing between parents and school through the PTA. According to Education Act 1996, it is compulsory for Malaysian parents to attend school programs, enabling them to achieve a better insight concerning the activities running in schools (Malaysia., 1996). In fact, the highest mean value is in the Parti 2: "always supporting school related activities". Yet, the lowest mean value is found in the statement of Parti 3: "frequent attendance to parents-teacher meeting". According to a research conducted by Mohammed et al. (2005), and Nachiappan et al. (2012) the main factor that influences parents' involvement in PTA activities is due to parents' heavy engagement in career besides their personal attitude. This becomes a drawback for parents to be involved in these

activities at the higher level. The patterns of involvement in different categories of autonomous schools also revealed that high performing schools have a higher level of participation for all activities. This discovery supports the statement by PEMANDU. (2010), explaining that schools' excellence is reflected by the level of parents' involvement in schools.

In sum it can be conclude the practice of SBM in Malaysia's autonomous schools is able to encourage parents' involvement in school related programs and activities. SBM also gives rights and opportunities for parents to participate in school's policy constitution other than the KPM and the school administration team. Nevertheless, personal attitude and parents' heavy engagement in work have unfortunately become the drawbacks in their levels of involvement in school programs.

Table-1. Respondents' Distribution in Autonomous Schools

| Type of school | Category of schools | | | |
	High Performance School (HPS)	CS Cohort 1	CS Cohort 2	Total
Full Residential School	79	16	16	111
Chinese National Type Schools	0	17	56	73
Tamil National Type Schools	0	15	16	31
National Secondary School	31	157	108	296
National Religious Secondary Schools	0	55	19	74
Technical & Vocational Secondary	0	27	19	46
National Primary School	19	48	90	157
Total	129	335	324	788

Data from Table 1 shows the distribution of respondents from 7 schools which were classified in 3 categories- high performing schools (HPS), cluster school-cohort 1 and 2.

Table-2. Parents' level of involvement in the schools' policy constitution process

Stakeholders	Mean	Standard Deviation
Ministry of Education	9.13	1.38
School Administrators	9.00	1.31
Parents	7.02	2.08
Other communities that related to school e.g.: school alumni, *NGO etc.*	6.23	2.35

As indicated in Table 2, the level of parents' involvement in the schools' policy constitution process are high (mean=7.02), subsequently to Ministry of Education (mean=9.13) and school administrators (mean=9.00).

Table-3. Parents' Involvement in School's Activities

Involvement	Parents in schools are…	Mean	S.D
Parti* 2	… always supporting the school activities	7.76	1.63
Parti 1	… always contacting schools, inquiring issues concerning their' children's academic performance	7.58	1.79
Parti 5	… concerned about school's development	7.54	1.69
Parti 4	… provide financial aid and support for school development.	7.36	1.79
Parti 6	… collaborate with the school to improve students discipline in this school	7.28	1.82
Parti 3	… attending parents-teachers meeting frequently	7.19	1.81

* the word 'parti' refers to participation

The findings in Table 3 revealed that the mean value of parents' involvement level in each school activities is relatively high with a mean value between 7.19- 7.76. The highest level of parents' involvement is in the act of "supporting school activities" (mean=7.76), followed by "always contacting schools, inquiring issues concerning their' children's academic performance" (mean=7.58). The least involvement is in the act of "frequent attendance to parent teacher meeting" (mean=7.19).

Table-4. Mean value of parents' involvement among different types of schools

Type of school		Parti 1	Parti 2	Parti 3	Parti 4	Parti 5	Parti 6
SBP	*Mean*	7.60	8.01	7.51	7.40	7.68	7.43
	Std. Deviation	1.69	1.46	1.41	1.69	1.45	1.62
SJK(C)	*Mean*	6.99	7.10	5.76	6.82	6.93	6.45
	Std. Deviation	1.50	1.28	2.06	1.66	1.57	1.47
SJK (T)	*Mean*	8.19	8.29	7.77	7.84	7.87	7.71
	Std. Deviation	1.14	1.53	1.45	1.68	1.69	1.77
SMK	*Mean*	7.51	7.69	7.15	7.28	7.44	7.26
	Std. Deviation	1.93	1.74	1.82	1.89	1.85	1.96
SMKA	*Mean*	7.68	8.09	7.59	7.88	7.91	7.65
	Std. Deviation	1.43	1.44	1.49	1.38	1.41	1.51
ST&V	*Mean*	7.07	7.48	6.85	7.07	7.20	7.00
	Std. Deviation	2.02	1.74	1.78	1.77	1.73	2.04
SK	*Mean*	7.97	7.83	7.51	7.47	7.79	7.39
	Std. Deviation	1.80	1.68	1.80	1.85	1.62	1.80
Total	*Mean*	7.58	7.76	7.19	7.36	7.54	7.28
	Std. Deviation	1.79	1.63	1.81	1.79	1.69	1.82

*The word 'parti' refers to participation of parents in schools' activities

The mean distribution in Table 4 shows a formation of patterns in parents' involvement in school activities of all seven types of autonomous schools. In general, the research findings shows the

highest value of parents' involvement is the activity of Parti 2 "always contacting schools, inquiring issues concerning their' children's academic performance" (mean=7.76) whereas the lowest mean value is for the activity from Parti 3 "concerned towards school's development" (mean=7.19).

Table-5. Level of Parents' Involvement among the Autonomous School Categories.

Involvement*	School categories	Mean	Std. Dev	N
Parti 1	High Performance	8.19	1.57	129
	Chort1	7.46	1.93	335
	Chort2	7.47	1.67	324
	Total	7.58	1.79	788
Parti 2	High Performance	8.22	1.43	129
	Chort1	7.80	1.68	335
	Chort2	7.52	1.62	324
	Total	7.76	1.63	788
Parti 3	High Performance	7.57	1.49	129
	Chort1	7.36	1.77	335
	Chort2	6.86	1.92	324
	Total	7.19	1.81	788
Parti 4	High Performance	7.41	1.65	129
	Chort1	7.47	1.85	335
	Chort2	7.22	1.77	324
	Total	7.36	1.79	788
Parti 5	High Performance	7.88	1.47	129
	Chort1	7.67	1.71	335
	Chort2	7.27	1.72	324
	Total	7.54	1.69	788
Parti 6	High Performance	7.53	1.60	129
	Chort1	7.36	1.91	335
	Chort2	7.09	1.79	324
	Total	7.28	1.82	788

* The *word 'parti' refers to involvement*

The mean distribution in Table 5 shows a pattern of level of parents' involvement in schools activities in the 3 autonomous schools' categories. The research findings, by and large, revealed that the level of parents' involvement are the highest for Parti 2 (mean=7.76), and the lowest is for Parti 3 (mean=7.19). Besides, the mean distribution also shows the highest mean value for parents' involvement in HPS category in almost all activities, except Parti 4. The activity of Parti 4 shows the highest mean value of cohort 1 category compared to other categories. In addition, Cohort 2 shows the lowest yet consistent mean value for parents' involvement in the listed school activities.

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