

The Influence of Parenting Styles on Child-Parent Relationship Among Chinese and Bumiputera in Sabah

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ABSTRACT

Several studies on child-parent relationships in Malaysia have been conducted before COVID-19. After the pandemic, most child-parent relationship studies were conducted abroad, such as Singapore, Greece, Belgium, and the United States. However, there are no published studies that investigated the child-parent relationship among Chinese and Bumiputera parents with preschool children in Sabah. This study aims to examine the difference in parenting styles between Chinese and Bumiputera parents with preschool children in Sabah. As well, to examine the influence of parenting styles on child-parent relationships. In the pilot study, 49 parents of preschool-aged children were surveyed. The reliability and validity are tested and convinced. This study would like to provides parents, educators, and the government with a preliminary picture of parenting styles and child-parent relationships to develop a strategy to improve or adjust early childhood education in the post-pandemic.

Contribution/Originality: This study is one of very few studies which have investigated parenting styles and child-parent relationship in Sabah, east Malaysia. Moreover, the participants focus on two race group of Chinese and Bumiputera parents, they are also rare examined in existing literature. This information is beneficial to the relevant government authorities, educators and parents.

1. Introduction

Since the end of 2019, COVID-19 has spread globally and is affecting children and parents in unprecedented ways (Cluver et al., 2020; Dong, Cao & Li, 2020; Chung, Lanier, & Wong, 2020). In January 2022, the United Nations estimates that 1.6 billion students are influenced (United Nations, 2022).

Malaysia, as a Southeast Asian country, has a diverse ethnic population. The Malay and indigenous tribes known as Bumiputera constitute the majority ethnic groups, accounting for approximately 69.3% of the total population of 32.5 million people. In addition, the

Chinese constitute the largest minority group, accounting for 22.8% of the population (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2019). Concurrently, the child-parent interaction is influenced by multiculturalism through different parenting strategies (Bornstein, 2013; Chen, Fu, & Yiu, 2019). Chiam asserted in *Child Care in Malaysia: Then and Now* that psychologists have long recognised that a child's first five years of life are critical for their formative years (Chiam, 2008). Early childhood education also focuses on four to six years old children (Mustafa, Nor, & Azman, 2013). The preschool children in this study are also referred to as 4 to 6 years old.

In Malaysia's *Shared Prosperity Vision 2030*, the primary two aims for transforming human capital are 35% of the high-skilled nation's labor force and the majority of the workforce in high-skill employment and future economic sectors will be Bumiputera. Children are an important resource for the country to achieve the goal of becoming a developed country. As a result, children are regarded as one of the most important assets for achieving long-term growth (Mohamad, Mohammad, & Ali, 2014). What's more, a healthy childhood sets the tone for successful adulthood and a bright future (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; Cui, Zhang, & Leung, 2021).

2. Literature Review

2.1. Child-parent relationship

In early childhood development, the child-parent relationship is extremely important. Flykt (2014) defined the child-parent relationship as a very special type of relationship usually beginning during pregnancy and characterized by a strong bond between the child and the parents (especially the mother). In addition, child-parent relationships are characterized by closeness and conflict between the parent and the child (Driscoll & Pianta, 2011). The interaction between child and parent is evolving and is the basis for the child's socialization and access to social support (Horstman, Hays, & Maliski, 2016), achieve emotional regulation (Lincoln et al., 2017), and learn (Callanan et al., 2020).

Several studies of child-parent relationships in Malaysia have only been carried out before COVID-19 (e.g. Fanti & Henrich, 2010; Ahmad et al., 2014; Yap, 2015; Wu & Yaacob, 2017; Aw et al., 2020). After the pandemic, most of the child-parent relationship studies were conducted abroad, such as in Singapore (Chung et al., 2020), Greece (Grigoropoulos, 2022), Belgium (Janssens et al., 2021), and the United States (Bate et al., 2021). However, there are no published studies that investigated the child-parent relationship among Chinese and Bumiputera parents with preschool children in Sabah in the post-epidemic.

2.2. Parenting styles

According to Darling (1999), parenting styles refer to a universal climate that includes family function and the child-rearing behavior of primary caregivers, particularly both parents. Baumrind (1967) classified parenting styles based on two dimensions: responsiveness and demandingness. The responsiveness and demandingness produce three parenting styles: authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive. The authoritative style is described as high responsiveness and high demandingness, while the authoritarian style is characterized by low responsiveness and high demanding. Finally, the permissive style is distinguished by high responsiveness and low demanding. In 1983, Maccoby and Martin (1983) expanded on Baumrind's (1967) research and identified a

fourth type of parenting style known as neglectful or uninvolved. Low responsiveness and low demandingness are characteristics the uninvolved style.

Authoritative parenting is found to produce the best child outcomes based on previous studies. For example, authoritarian parenting has been linked to higher levels of life satisfaction in children (Lavrič & Naterer, 2020), positive child behavior (Johari et al., 2011), higher academic achievement (Spera, 2005), and a lower level of adolescent depression (Sanjeevan & Zoysa, 2018; Prativa & Deeba, 2019); higher self-esteem in children and positive youth development (Hong, Long, & Rahman, 2015; Kiadarbandsari et al., 2016; Woon & Chin, 2018).

Authoritarian style is found that has a negative influence on children's academic achievement and behaviour, self-esteem, and psychosocial adjustments in Malaysia (Johari et al., 2011; Sumargi, Prasetyo, & Ardelia, 2020; Delvecchio et al., 2020).

Permissive parenting describes parents who are warm and indulgent while enforcing few rules and boundaries. Children raised by this parenting style are usually performance average academic and behaviour problem. However, they have good social skills and high self-esteem (Kimble, 2014; Kimble, Hubbs-Tait, Topham, & Harrist, 2016). Johari et al. (2011) examined 200 Malay families with 7 to 9 years old children in Malaysia. The result indicated that authoritarian and permissive parenting styles are negative related to children's behavior and academic performance.

Parents in uninvolved parenting shows little mental and moral support, supervision, protection, attention and love to their children. Parents know their children very limited since they do not spend much time together. Nevertheless, Morin (2019) stated that some parents are unintentionally neglect their child because they are busy with work. Children of rejecting, angry, or uninvolved parents are more likely than children of warm, involved parents who consistently enforce rules to be socially rejected by their peers. Kimble et al. (2016) assessed 445 mothers of first-graders and discovered that an uninvolved parenting style predicted depressive symptoms in children.

In Malaysia, the authoritarian parenting style is found to be mostly associated Malaysian collectivist context (Baharudin & Keshavarz, 2009; Schwartz et al., 2010), and have historically been strengthened by Confucianism (Pan, Gauvain, & Schwartz, 2013). Contrary to the popular belief that collectivist cultures are primarily authoritarian, Salehuddin and Winskel (2016) compared parenting styles in Malay, Chinese, and Indian caregivers in Malaysia and found that Malaysian parents have a more authoritative than authoritarian parenting style. Similarly, Shahlal, Isa, and Kechek (2021) examined 100 students from a secondary school in Sabah and Yahaya et al. (2012) investigated 130 primary school students in Johor. The result of these studies supported the view that most parents practiced authoritative parenting styles in Malaysia. However, Hanafi examined parenting style in Malay adolescents and the result indicated their parents prefer permissive style from their perceive (Hanafi, 2004).

Parenting styles reflect the warm and supportive relationship parents have with their children (responsiveness) and the extent to which they monitor and limit their children (demandingness) (Sanders, Gooley, & Nicholson, 2000; Monaghan et al., 2012). Differently parenting styles may emerge and influence child outcome based on various cultural norms and expectations (Kagitcibasi, 2007; Sen, Yavuz-Muren, & Yagmurlu, 2014). In addition, parental education level moderates parenting styles and influences

rearing practices ([Hong et al., 2015](#); [Keshavarz & Baharudin, 2013](#)). Although several studies have investigated parenting styles in Malaysia, few studies have considered parenting styles of preschool children, especially after the COVID-19 outbreak. Thus, it is necessary to investigate the parenting styles of preschool children among Chinese and Bumiputera parents in Sabah, as well as to examine the association between parental education level and parenting styles. Parents have to face the rising unemployment and financial insecurity which influence parenting and child-parent relationship in the impact of COVID-19 ([Balenzano, Moro, & Girardi, 2020](#); [Hiraoka & Tomoda, 2020](#); [Wu et al., 2020](#)). Moreover, a study in Singapore indicated that the pandemic effect on parenting stress which indirectly influenced parenting styles and child-parent relationship ([Chung et al., 2020](#)).

Child-parent relationship and parenting styles

The quality of the child-parent relationship can be distinguished from parenting styles and practices. In addition, the development of children is influenced by parenting styles and child-parent relationships together. For example, according to [Pinquart \(2014\)](#), a child's healthier eating habits and increased physical activity is related to higher levels of parental responsiveness and closeness child-parent relationship. [Bergin \(2001\)](#) stated that conflicted child-parent relationships exist, implying that increased shared reading frequency may not result in positive outcomes for children. The development of children's emergent literacy skills is influenced by parenting and child-parent relationships as well ([Dexter & Stacks, 2014](#)). Moreover, positive children outcome such as social and academic benefit from supportive parenting styles and child-parent relationships, in other word, negative parenting styles and child-parent relationship hinder children's developmental outcomes ([Stattin & Kerr, 2000](#); [Holden, 2015](#); [September et al., 2015](#)).

In conclusion, parenting styles have found that related to the child-parent relationship ([Schuiringa, Nieuwenhuijzen, Castro, & Matthys, 2015](#); [September et al., 2015](#)). Several studies indicated that there is a positive relationship between parenting styles and child-parent relationship ([Dewolff & Ijzendoorn, 1997](#); [Hwang & Jung, 2021](#)), whereas other studies hold the opposite view ([Segrin et al., 2015](#)). Positive parenting can aid in the development of healthy child-parent relationships ([Morris et al., 2007](#)).

The purpose of this study is to investigate the difference in parenting styles between Chinese and Bumiputera parents with preschool children in Sabah. It also examines the influence of parenting styles on child-parent relationships among Chinese and Bumiputera parents in Sabah. In the pilot study, reliability and validity are examined.

3. Method

3.1. Participants

A sample of 49 parents with preschool children in Sabah was selected as the sample of the pilot study. A complete set of questionnaires was distributed to each of the respondents through an online google form. The questionnaires are provided in both English and Malay versions.

3.2. Measures

3.2.1. Parenting Style and Dimension Questionnaire (PSDQ)

Robinson et al. (2001) developed the PSDQ to measure three parenting styles in 2001 (Robinson et al., 2001). Subsequently, Kimble (2014) extended this instrument to measure the fourth parenting style, uninvolved. In this study, Kimble's (2014) instrument is adapted that examined four parenting styles: authoritarian, authoritative, permissive, and uninvolved styles.

The questionnaire included multiple-choice items, each item using a five-point scale from "never" to "always" (coded 1 to 5). Four dimensions of parenting styles are measured by the PSDQ. They are authoritative (three subscales includes eleven items: items 1, 7, 12, 14, and 27 grouped into subscale of warmth and support, item 5, 11, 25, 29, and 31 grouped into subscale of regulation, and item 21 grouped into subscale of autonomy granting), authoritarian (three subscales includes nine items: item 4 for non-reasoning, item 2, 6, 19 and 32 are physical coercion, and item 13, 16, 23 and 30 are verbal hostility), permissive (seven items grouped into two subscales: item 3, 9, 18 and 22 are autonomy granting and item 8, 15 and 24 are indulgent) and uninvolved (five items grouped into two subscales: item 10, 26 and 28 for non-reasoning/punitive and item 17 and 20 for indulgent). The dimensions are calculated by taking the arithmetic mean of the scale items. All dimensions and styles were scored between 1-5, with higher scores indicating more use of its dimensions or style.

The instrument PSDQ has been used in previous studies to measure parenting style (Hadad, Meishar-Tal, & Blau, 2020; Rokoyah & Hastuti 2019; Kimble, Hubbs-Tait, Topham, & Harrist, 2016). On account of Kimble's (2014) version of PSDQ measures all four dimensions of parenting styles and it was used widely in a previous study. This instrument is adapted to measure parenting styles in this study. Moreover, according to the grammar rules, the instrument in this study changed "our child" to "my child" of items 1-10, 12-25, 27-30, 32 (e.g. "I slap our child when the child misbehaves." change to "I slap my child when the child misbehaves.").

3.2.2. Child-Parent Relationship Scale

Child-Parent Relationship Scale-Short Form (CPRS-SF) was developed by Dr. Robert Pianta at the University of Virginia in 1992. It is a self-report questionnaire that parents use to examine the relationships with their children aged 3 to 12 (Pianta, 1992). The questionnaire using a five-point scale from 'Definitely does not apply' to 'Definitely applies' (code 1 to 5). The conflicts subscale consists of 8 items (No. 2,4,8,10,11,12,13,14). The closeness subscale consists of 7 items (No. 1,3,5,6,7,9,15). Higher scores indicate higher level of that subscale depending on the calculation of mean score for each subscale.

The CPRS-SF has showed good reliability and criterion validity in previous studies (e.g., Driscoll & Pianta, 2011; Dyer, Kaufman, and Fagan, 2017; Escalante-Barrios et al., 2020; Bate et al., 2021). The instrument is specifically adapted to suit preschool children and their parents who are the target participant of this study.

3.3. Data Analyses

The data of pilot study are analyzed using SPSS version 28. First, descriptive statistics were used to analyze the demographic information questionnaire (e.g. child age, child gender, mother's race, and mother's highest level of education), which included frequency, percentages, and mean. Secondly, normality test, Cronbach's Alpha and

exploratory factor analysis were used for analyzing the normally distribution, consistency reliability and validity respectively.

4. Result of Pilot Study:

A pilot study was carried out to determine the suitability of the instrument. A sample of 49 parents with preschool children in Sabah was selected as the sample of the pilot study. A complete set of questionnaires was distributed to each of the respondents through an online google form. In terms of gender of the children, 33 male and 16 females (Table 1). The number of children aged from 4 to 6 years old are 24, 20 and 5 respectively (Table 2). Mother's race, there are 25 Bumiputera and 24 Chinese (Table 3). Finally, maternal education level, the majority graduated from secondary and degree (30.6% respectively), followed by Diploma (22.4%) and primary (10.2%). The least one is master only 3% (Table 4).

Table 1: Child's Gender

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	33	67.3	67.3	67.3
	Female	16	32.7	32.7	100.0
	Total	49	100.0	100.0	

Table 2: Child's Age

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	4	24	49.0	49.0	49.0
	5	20	40.8	40.8	89.8
	6	5	10.2	10.2	100.0
	Total	49	100.0	100.0	

Table 3: Mother's Race

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Chinese	24	49.0	49.0	49.0
	Bumiputera	25	51.0	51.0	100.0
	Total	49	100.0	100.0	

Table 4: Mother's Highest Level of Education

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Primary	5	10.2	10.2	10.2
	Secondary	15	30.6	30.6	40.8
	Diploma	11	22.4	22.4	63.3
	Degree	15	30.6	30.6	93.9
	Master	3	6.1	6.1	100.0
	Total	49	100.0	100.0	

4.1. Normality Test for Parenting Styles

A normality test was conducted to ascertain the data of the study were normally distributed. As the sample size for the pilot study was less than 2000 (Royston, 1982), the Shapiro-Wilk test was used. Furthermore, several studies suggested that the Shapiro-Wilk test was the best normality test (Ghasemi & Zahedias, 2012). Since the significance level of the Shapiro-Wilk test of parenting styles, social support and child-parent relationship is 0.118, 0.061 and 0.061 ($p > 0.05$) respectively in Table 5, it indicated that the data were normally distributed.

Table 5: Tests of Normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnova			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Parenting styles	.133	49	.067	.962	49	.118
Social support	.134	46	.037	.953	46	.061
Child-Parent relationship	.123	46	.078	.953	46	.061

*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

4.2. Reliability Test

Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha is used to test the inter consistency reliability. The Table 6 shows the value of Cronbach's Alpha for parenting styles, social support, and child-parent relationship was 0.760, 0.896, and 0.889 respectively.

Table 6: Cronbach's Alpha for tested variables

Variables	Dimensions	Total Number of Items	Cronbah's Alpha	Remarks
Parenting styles	Authoritative style	11	0.921	Independent
	Authoritarian style	9	0.864	
	Permissive style	7	0.620	
	Uninvolved style	5	0.634	
	Total	32	0.760	
Social support	Significant Others	4	0.940	Independent
	Friends	4	0.866	
	Family	4	0.881	
	Total	12	0.896	
Child-parent relationship	Conflict	7	0.871	Dependent
	Closeness	8	0.906	
	Total	15	0.823	

4.3. Validity Test

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was used to determine the underlying structure of the instruments in this study. In the Table 7, KMO for parenting styles, social support, and child-parent relationship was 0.769, 0.680, and 0.655 respectively. Overall KMO value of more than 0.6 and the p value of Bartlett's test of sphericity less than 0.05 is considered acceptable (Kaiser, 1974). It indicated that the relationship between variables was strong. The data were therefore suitable for factor analysis (Kaiser, 1974).

Table 7: Validity Test for tested variables

Variables	KMO	Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (Sig.)
Parenting Styles	0.769	<0.001
Social Support	0.680	<0.001
Child-Parent Relationship	0.655	<0.001

4. Conclusion

The pilot study indicated that the items of the questionnaire are internally consistent and reliable. The result provided a context to undertake the analysis of data.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

All procedures performed in this study involving human participants were conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional research committee. Informed consent was obtained from all participants.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors reported no conflicts of interest for this work and declare that there is no potential conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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