EDUCATIONAL ISSUES IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS FROM PARENTS' PERSPECTIVES AND RELATIONS WITHIN EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

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ABSTRACT: *Currently, various educational issues encountered by students in primary schools are actively discussed in Malaysia. Therefore, this study aims to identify these educational issues from parents' perspectives when their children enrol in primary schools. A qualitative approach was adopted in this study, utilizing a constructivist grounded theory (CGT) design as introduced by Kathy Charmaz. A total of 32 participants were selected through purposive, theoretical, and snowball sampling techniques. The data analysis process involved initial coding and focused coding. The findings revealed five themes: educational issues, experiences, attitudes, strategies, and outcomes. The results indicate that the prevailing educational issues include basic needs, safety, student ethics, heavy school bags, co-curricular activities, and the curriculum. The study concludes that these educational issues are indeed present, and parents' perspectives on them can be classified into two viewpoints: sentience and apathy. The study's findings can be interpreted through various educational psychology theories, with implications that may enhance awareness of primary school educational issues and, ultimately, fulfil national educational aspirations.*

Keywords: Qualitative, constructivist grounded theory, primary school, Malaysian education system, educational psychology.

1. INTRODUCTION

On October 15, 2022, social media was abuzz after a public school teacher posted about receiving a disciplinary letter from the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE) for several charges, including posting comments on their social media about primary school schedules and subjects, as well as hosting a live session discussing Malaysia's education issues. The teacher questioned MOE's decision, citing a need to openly address pressing educational concerns, such as the dangers of heavy school bags, an overcrowded curriculum, large class sizes, and insufficient time for core subjects like Mathematics. Based on observation, the post received substantial responses and support from parents of primary school students.

This incident prompted the authors' interest in investigating primary school education issues in this nation, as highlighted on social media and understanding parents' perspectives. Do parents agree that these issues affect their children's learning, and if so, what are their specific concerns? Additionally, what are their recommendations for addressing these issues in primary schools? Based on the study's findings, a substantive theory will be developed on emerging educational issues in primary schools, besides proposing a theoretical model based on the substantive theory. Parents with primary school children were chosen as research participants, while a qualitative approach and constructivist grounded theory (CGT) research design were selected to explore parents' perspectives on these issues. The study's research questions are: i) what educational issues do parents identify based on their child's experience in primary schools ii) how do parents address these educational issues iii) what substantive theory and theoretical model can be developed from parents responses, and iv) how do this CGT study's substantive theory and model relate to existing educational psychology theories.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In conducting a CGT-based study, a literature review is generally discouraged before data collection and analysis [1, 2]. As emphasized by Charmaz [3-5], examining previous studies should be postponed until the conceptual analysis of data has been developed. Accordingly, the authors compare the study findings, substantive theory, and theoretical model with the current literature in the discussion section at the end of the research report.

3. METHODOLOGY

Study design and technique

This study employed a qualitative approach to examine each participant's meanings, intentions, and actions [6]. Accordingly, a CGT design was selected, providing a suitable framework for inductively and abductively exploring parents' perspectives on educational issues [4, 6]. To gather the necessary data, the authors conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions posed to participants. Audio recordings were used during interviews [7, 8], allowing researchers to focus fully on participants and obtain more detailed information than through note-taking alone. While interviews are sufficient for this qualitative study, more participants were included to ensure data saturation [6].

Additionally, the authors have independently managed all data collection and analysis processes, from question development, interviewing, transcription, coding, memo writing, constant comparison, theoretical sampling, data-driven theory building, drafting, and final reporting. This process enabled a comprehensive understanding of participants' experiences, contributing to the development of a substantive theory.

Selection of Study Samples

By using purposive sampling methods, the authors have chosen to select participants from among parents with

children in primary school. Subsequently, snowball sampling was conducted, where one participant referred the authors to another potential participant [9]. The authors asked participants if they had acquaintances or friends with children in primary school and requested introductions to those contacts. This snowball sampling process assisted the authors, the study instrument, in identifying individuals who met the study's participant criteria.

Additionally, the authors engaged in theoretical sampling until theoretical saturation was achieved. Theoretical sampling refers to the search for data relevant to the theory being developed [6]. This form of sampling also enhances theoretical insights during the data collection and analysis process [10]. Theoretical saturation occurs when sample selection and data analysis reach a stage where no new information emerges, or the information obtained overlaps with previously acquired data [11, 9].

The authors implemented theoretical sampling after completing the coding of the 8th participant interview. The interviewing process continued until theoretical saturation was achieved, with theoretical categories reaching saturation during the 25th participant interview. However, data collection continued until the 32nd participant to ensure all-inclusive data saturation. On average, each interview session lasted approximately 50 minutes, with audio recordings of the interviews conducted.

Data Collection Process

In grounded theory (GT), researchers can develop theories through various types of data, including field notes, observation reports, ethnographic records, interview statements, video recordings, information from documents such as records and written or printed reports, or a combination of these data types [4, 6, 12-14]. In the intensive interviews conducted, face-to-face meetings between the authors and participants enabled the latter to speak freely, while the authors listened attentively to acquire information from them. This direct interaction and relationship allowed the authors to pay attention to both body language and the words expressed by participants. As suggested by Edwards and Holland [7], listening, questioning, and responding skills are essential because they help encourage participants to be more open and honest in their responses. As a result, the data obtained in this study are more comprehensive, descriptive, and rich in information. Regarding audio recordings of interview sessions, prior consent was obtained from participants before recording commenced. Each recording was then transcribed for the purposes of coding, theoretical sampling, and constant comparison.

Data Analysis and Theory Building Process

In CGT studies, data analysis involves systematic procedures that commence as soon as data is collected. According to Charmaz [4, 6], the coding process is the initial step in analyzing data within CGT research. The researcher conducted coding by naming segments within the transcribed data. Subsequently, the authors categorized and classified each fragment of data. Significant elements within the data were identified

through coding, and their meanings and content were defined [15]. As recommended by Charmaz [3, 4, 6, 16], and Charmaz and Bryant [17], the authors carried out initial coding by categorizing data line by line [18], whether by words, sentence lines, or specific segments.

Next, the researcher undertook focused coding, which involved identifying the most significant and frequent codes derived from the initial coding [4, 6]. Through the established categories, theoretical sampling was conducted until theoretical saturation was achieved [10, 19]. This process was utilized to accurately identify and extract the most prominent codes from the dataset [4, 6].

The researcher also has conducted the constant comparison method suggested by Glaser and Strauss [10], which involves comparing codes with codes, codes with categories, categories with categories, and categories with concepts to inductively and abductively form theories based on the obtained data. The researcher continuously performed constant comparisons at each stage of the study, as this process is fundamental in enhancing the quality of studies employing GT, distinguishing it from other qualitative research methodologies.

During the coding and analysis of data, the authors also recorded memos [10, 15, 19] which involved writing informal notes to articulate the processes, assumptions, and actions grouped within specific categories. Memo writing is a critical step in the GT research process as it allows the researcher to interact with the analyzed data by providing assumptions or commentary on the data [3, 6, 10, 16]. The researcher utilized four types of memos: interview memos, case memos, conceptual memos, and activity memos, based on recommendations by Nor Junainah [20]. In summary, the researcher actively engaged with the collected data and developed their ideas through memo writing. Moreover, the researcher refined subsequent data collection and provided critical reflexivity through the written memos. In the coding process, the researcher employed the ATLAS.ti software facilitated the coding of segments within all 32 participant transcripts.

Research Quality

In evaluating CGT studies, four criteria can be utilized to assess research quality: *credibility, originality, resonance,* and *usefulness*, as suggested by Charmaz [4, 6, 21]. The researcher did not employ the quality assessment criteria typically associated with other qualitative research designs, such as validity, reliability, applicability, or triangulation, as seen in case studies, ethnographic, or phenomenological methods. This is because the evaluation criteria proposed by Charmaz [4, 6, 21] for CGT studies are deemed sufficient. Furthermore, the researcher consistently implemented the constant comparative method at every stage of the study, as this process is fundamental in enhancing the quality of studies utilizing GT.

4. FINDINGS

Data Analysis and Theory Substantive Development

In this study, the authors have identified 187 initial codes and 13 tentative categories based on the initial coding process of 32 interview participant transcripts. Some of

the initial codes identified are presented in Table 1. After the initial codes were developed, the researcher revisited these codes to identify focused codes. Focused codes are the main codes that can be discerned based on their frequency within the data. This process of focused coding also involves examining the relationships between each code, allowing for the construction of subcategories and main categories. Table 2 below presents several of the main codes and main categories. Meanwhile, Table 3 displays parts of the main categories, subthemes, and themes generated from the focused coding process.

Table 1: Parts of Initial Codes and Tentative Categories

	Initial Code	Tentative Category
1.	Evaluating child education foundations: personal experience	Experience
2.	Evaluating children based on learning: religious belief	
3.	Perceiving _syllabus as chaotic	Curriculum
4.	Believing_curriculum as extensive_difficult to complete	
5.	Thinking_large class sizes as reducing teachers' concentration	
6.	Perceiving policy changes benefiting children's learning	Education system
7.	Perceiving_lack of confidence in the existing education system	

Table 2: Parts of the Focused Codes & Main Categories in the Focused Coding Phase

	Focused Codes/Main Codes	Main Categories
1.	Evaluating_child_learning_foundations: personal experience	1. Learning Foundation
2.	Evaluating_child_learning_foundations: religious belief	
3.	Feeling_tuition fees: high cost_school expenses	1. Financial issue
4.	Realizing_student equipment: cost of study tools	
5.	Perceiving_transportation: high cost	2. Transportation
6.	Feeling_student attitudes: lack of motivation	1. Student academic status
7.	Feeling_student attitudes: lack_ study achievement	
8.	Thnking_syllabus: challenging_learning curriculum	2. Education system
9.	Perceiving_current policy: changes_cause more difficulty	

Table 3: Parts of the Main Categories, Subthemes, & Themes

Main Categories	Subthemes	Themes
1. Learning Foundation	1. Experience	1. Experience
1. Financial issues	1. Basic needs	2. Educational issues
2. Transportation		
1. Student academic status	1. Curriculum	
2. Education system		
1. Parents' roles	1. Parents' attitude	3. Attitudes
2. Parents' values		
1. Tutoring	1. Parents' guidance	4. Strategies
2. Advising		
1. Achievement status	Current achievement	5. Outcomes

After conducting the focused coding process, the analysis

revealed 99 main codes, 39 main categories, 20 sub-themes, and five themes. These themes encompass educational issues, experiences, attitudes, strategies, and outcomes, as illustrated in Table 3. Subsequently, the researcher identified the relationships among these themes through a diagram by constructing a mind map. This mind map visually represents the interconnections among all the main codes, main categories, sub-themes, and themes based on the study's analytical results. The development of this mind map has enabled the researcher to comprehensively assess the extent to which the existing educational issues relate to experiences, attitudes, strategies, and outcomes derived from the problem-solving approaches. The researcher has constructed a substantive theory based on these categories, sub-themes, and themes, subsequently forming a theoretical model presented in the diagram in Figure 1 to illustrate the entirety of this substantive theory. Figure 1 also shows the two kinds of parent perspectives on educational issues: sentience and apathy.
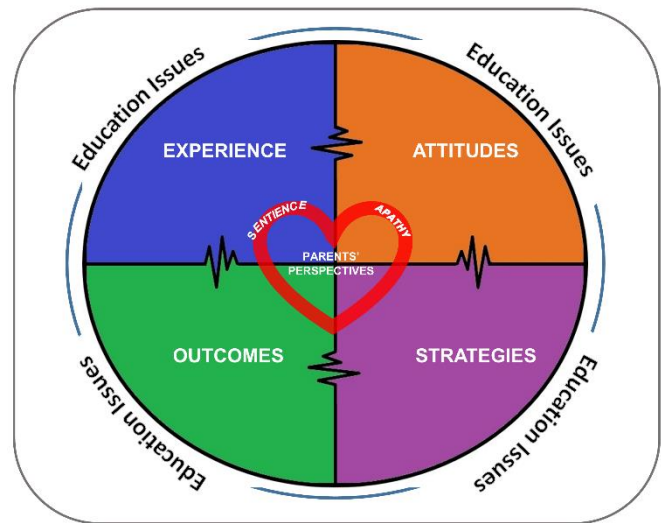

Figure 1: Model of Parental Perspective on Educational Issues in Schools (Model PPEIS_a)

5. DISCUSSION

In this theoretical model presented in Figure 2, the authors have designated it as the Model of Parental Perspective on Educational Issues in Schools (Model PPEIS_a). Based on the construction of this substantive theory, the researcher identified five major themes related to educational issues occurring in primary schools from the parents' perspective: 1) issues, 2) experiences, 3) attitudes, 4) strategies, and 5) outcomes. Issues' theme encompasses educational concerns that arise in primary schools, as shared by participants, including basic needs, safety, student behaviour, heavy school bags, extracurricular activities, and curriculum matters.

The subsequent theme, experiences, is constructed around a main category of educational foundations and a sub-theme of experiences. In contrast, the attitude theme contains three sub-themes: attitudes toward parents, attitudes toward schools, and attitudes toward policymakers.

The themes of these strategies emerge from how these educational issues are addressed. This theme includes several strategies, such as parents' guidance, spirituality, seeking support, aggression, passivity, assertiveness, compromise, avoidance of confrontation, and problem-solving. Finally, the outcomes' theme is derived from three main categories: achievement status, behavioral changes, and emotional changes.

The researcher conducted this study to identify parents' perspectives on the educational issues occurring in primary schools. The researcher explored the existing educational problems and delved deeper into the underlying factors that contribute to these issues affecting their children. Additionally, the researcher aimed to observe the reactions or responses of parents when confronted with these problems. These parents are either attentive and deeply concerned (sentience) or perceive these issues as insignificant burdens on their children (apathy).

Based on the theoretical model presented in Figure 2, the researcher found two distinct groups of parents concerning these educational issues. The first group consists of sentient or proactive parents who are consistently committed to finding the best solutions for their children's problems in school [22, 23, 24]. In contrast, the second group, characterized by apathetic parents, mainly allows these issues to persist without taking the necessary actions to address them [25, 26].

Implications of Findings in Educational Psychology

The substantive theory and theoretical model developed based on the findings of this study can significantly contribute to the field of educational psychology. This is particularly relevant given that the study is grounded in educational issues occurring in primary schools, which are interconnected with various aspects of educational psychology. The research addresses the attitudes and behaviours of parents as they encounter the identified educational issues, as well as how these issues impact the developmental trajectories of both parents and their children throughout their primary education. While some may regard the primary school experience as relatively unimportant, in the scope of educational psychology, student behaviour from early stages, such as preschool and primary school, profoundly affects their lives after completing their education. Various psychological theories can be linked to the themes emerging from this study's findings. Among the psychological theories relevant to the data of this research are 1) Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory, 2) Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory, and 3) Vygotsky's Cognitive Development Theory.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory posits that individuals are motivated to fulfil specific needs in their pursuit of self-actualization. These needs are referred to as the hierarchy of needs, originally consisting of five levels [27], which have since expanded to eight [28]. The eight levels can be categorized into basic and growth needs. Basic needs encompass food, shelter, clothing, safety, love, esteem, and self-confidence, while growth needs include cognitive, aesthetic, self-actualization, and

transcendence. According to this theory, needs at each level of the pyramid must be met starting from the lowest tier before individuals can progress to higher levels.

In this study, the authors found that financial factors significantly influence participants' ability to address educational issues. Parents' financial status is closely linked to their capacity to provide for their children's primary and growth needs. For instance, one participant noted the necessity of allocating funds to cover cognitive needs, such as school fees and supplies. This participant had to consider ways to generate income to address these fundamental needs, opting for part-time work to supplement their finances.

Cognitive development is closely related to an individual's ability to think, explain, understand, and retain various information in their surroundings. Although the understanding of cognitive development evolves, two classical theories of cognitive development serve as the foundation for contemporary cognitive development theories—namely, the theories of Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky. According to Piaget [29], children's cognitive development is not continuous but occurs sequentially, progressing through stages from infancy to adulthood. Piaget's stage theory of cognitive development can be divided into four stages: the sensorimotor stage (0 to 2 years), the preoperational stage (2 to 7 years), the concrete operational stage (7 to 11 years), and the formal operational stage (12 years to the end of adolescence). The stages outlined in Piaget's theory of cognitive development can assist educators in selecting appropriate activities for students in schools. For instance, children in the concrete operational stage (7 to 11 years) can be provided with concrete resources in their education, as they can conceptualize and conserve objects or events in their minds. They are also able to view matters from others' perspectives and possess the ability to classify, organize, and differentiate objects.

In contrast, Vygotsky suggests that sociocultural factors can significantly influence an individual's cognitive development. He argues that the learning process is shaped by social, cultural, and historical influences from the environment in which the individual is raised. For Vygotsky, language proficiency and opportunities for social interaction with the surrounding community also affect the learning process of knowledge or skills [30, 31].

This study observes that curriculum issues are closely related to an individual's cognitive development theory. This is evident as some parents express concerns that the curriculum for certain subjects, such as Mathematics, History, and Science, is too advanced for their children. Furthermore, they contend that policymakers should revisit the curriculum to ensure it aligns with their children's cognitive development stages. Some of their children feel overwhelmed by the high curriculum demands, which leads to a lack of motivation to learn earnestly. Policymakers must also consider the economic capabilities of low-income groups, who often cannot afford to send their children to extra tuition classes if they fall behind in keeping pace with increasingly advanced curricula.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Primary school students in Malaysia currently face various educational challenges. Therefore, this research aims to explore and subsequently identify these educational issues from parents' perspectives regarding their children who are enrolled in primary school. The findings indicate that the current educational problems encompass many issues. Parents, teachers, school authorities, and policymakers have adopted various strategies and approaches to address the explored challenges. The substantive theory and theoretical model revealed two types of parental perspectives: the proactive and the apathetic. When the strategies employed by parents do not yield the desired results, they either remain engaged by continually seeking alternatives to resolve the issues or adopt an apathetic stance, merely acquiescing to the problem while hoping that other stakeholders will provide the best solutions.

This study concludes that stakeholders in the education sector must address these educational issues, particularly those involved in the school system. Furthermore, the strategies and recommendations identified in this study can be implemented by various stakeholders in the education system, such as parents, educators, school administrators, and the Ministry of Education. The findings of this study also offer valuable insights for research in the field of Educational Psychology to improve existing educational methods in schools and other educational institutions. This initiative is crucial for establishing an effective and efficient education system, teaching methodologies, and learning techniques in the country, ultimately fostering a resilient citizenry capable of competing globally.

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