

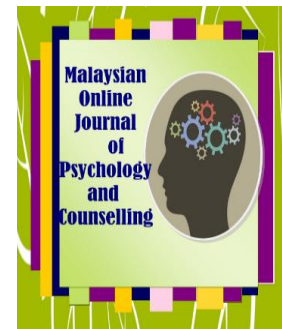
ASSESSING PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT MODEL AND CHILDREN'S MALAY LANGUAGE READING SKILLS IN MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY: THE PANDEMIC CHALLENGE

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ABSTRACT

The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic has marked significant changes in parental involvement in learning with young children. Parents juggled multiple roles at home, requiring them to be resourceful and 'present' during their child's learning. The current study examines parental involvement dimensions on children's reading skills in the Malay language among six-year-old children. The analyses were based on 310 dyads from one east state in Malaysia. All respondents were selected based on stratified random sampling from private kindergartens in Malaysia. The study examined parental reports on five dimensions including parents teaching efficacy beliefs, authoritative parenting practice, teacher guidelines, communication with kindergarten management and home reading literacy activity. Children's reading skills were assessed with three components: identifying uppercase and lowercase, reading syllables and reading words. The results revealed that despite multiple movement control orders, most six-year-old Malaysian children could grasp and showed commendable results in three reading skills assessments. Parents showed a moderate level of teaching efficacy which resulted in a negative contribution to children's reading skills. Nevertheless, this study suggested that with authoritative parenting practices and consistent communication with the management and teachers, the children's reading skills would be maintained and developed consistently, despite parents and teachers juggling multiple expectations, roles, and attitudes of young learners during the pandemic.

Keywords: *Parental Involvement in Reading Activities, Reading Skills in Malay Language, Authoritative Parenting Practices*



**Volume 11 (2),
December 2024**

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INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact globally, especially in education, social interaction, and parenting. Current research on its impact suggested many important findings and current perspectives on child development, especially in learning. As Malaysia experienced two movement control operations (MCO) and continuous school and kindergarten closures, parental roles and family functioning were expected to be resourceful (De Jong et al., 2023), especially for young learners. Research across the world witnessed parents facing multiple challenges due to the pandemic: job loss due to the minimal operation by the companies to reduce the cost and lack of knowledge on online learning integration among parents and untrained teachers. There is a higher likelihood of learning to be left out, affecting children's motivation (Yildic et al., 2022). Limited knowledge of synchronous and asynchronous learning (Tamin & Mohamad, 2020); minimal access to the internet due to geographical and location barriers; such as children and parents from rural areas struggling to get better access to the internet (Siti Rosiah et al., 2021), inefficient learning devices due to sharing learning devices with other siblings (Loganathan et al., 2021), and limited digital literacy and knowledge on learning application (Jafar et al., 2022) have forced parents to work strategically with teachers and administrators, ensuring their child's learning does not negatively affect.

Since the pandemic brought multiple challenges to parents, teachers and kindergarten administrators, the current study sees the urgency to observe parental involvement dimensions that may affect children's reading skills positively or negatively. It is hypothesized that interaction with different dimensions, such as teachers' guidelines, communication with management and home literacy activity with internal factors like parents' teaching efficacy beliefs and authoritative parenting practices faced by parents, can implicate either positively or negatively to children's reading skills in the Malay language. Although Malaysians achieved a 97% literacy rate (among the highest in ASEAN countries), the number of avid readers remained unsatisfied. Many attempted to increase reading habits at all levels of life, yet little outcome prevail in a multicultural setting with multiple language practices.

Malaysia is a multiracial country with three dominant ethnicities, Malay, Chinese and Indian, with a mother tongue for each ethnicity. Thus, children experience at least two languages: their mother tongue and the Malay language as an official language. At the kindergarten level, children are taught Malay and English in equal hours, and they are expected to be able to read before joining Standard 1 Primary level. Being competent users of both languages is important as these skills will ease children's learning in classrooms, supporting their socialization with friends. Nevertheless, the importance of the Malay language to young learners is always camouflaged by their mother tongue(s) and English. On many occasions, learning the Malay language is only practiced for the purpose of passing the national examination.

The main objectives of this study are to examine parental involvement dimensions potentially affecting children's reading skills in the Malay language. Three objectives were developed as follows:

- i. To investigate association between factors affecting on children reading skills
- ii. To identify effect size differences of factors on children reading skills
- iii. To assess the TEB and APP as mediating elements for internal factors to influence children reading skills

LITERATURE REVIEW

Reading is an important component of children's development. International Literacy Association mentioned the importance of literacy skills, especially in reading, in allowing children to develop their potential, enjoy their lives and participate fully in communities and society (ILA, 2019). Goodwin and Jimenez (2020) also added, that through reading, children can function as individuals and enrich their personal, social, and cultural adaptations. Reading activities allow children to build their capacity for creative and critical thinking, expand their knowledge base and ability to respond with empathy and show compassion towards others. Much of the literature confirms and suggests that early exposure to reading positively impacts children's reading readiness positively and accelerates their reading skills (Salinskas et al., 2021; UK Department for Education, 2022). In addition, children nowadays are exposed to more than one language, opening more doors for them to access other cultures, languages, and life practices. As reading literacy becomes an important life skill, reading should not be limited to formal settings. Parental involvement in reading activities is highly recommended, as parents are known as children's first teachers in their lives (Brin, 2020).

In the local context, most Malaysian children are exposed to at least two languages. As the Malay language is a compulsory language as an official language in the National Constitution, all Malaysians should be able to communicate and practice the language successfully. The Malay language is made compulsory to pass the national examination, namely Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia or SPM and one of the important criteria for career development, especially in the civil servant sector. Nevertheless, the Malay language's overall achievement in national examinations is still moderate (KPM, 2019). This could be reasoned with the limited use and usage of the language as it is only learned in a formal setting. At an earlier stage, children are more comfortable conversing in their mother tongue and mingling with peers of similar ethnicities and languages. If only the children were pursuing at national schools, then their Malay language exposure would be more dynamic than those in vernacular schools, as learning three different languages, namely Malay, Chinese and Tamil language required different systems (Winskel, 2020). Hence, this study would examine further the parental involvement in practicing the Malay language, specifically in reading activities at a young age. There are five dimensions proposed in this study, as this study utilized the Ecological theory by Bronfenbrenner to navigate the study.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) posited an important interaction between multi-systems that shape and characterize the development of a child or individual. In this study, the interaction between five system structures is examined, namely the interaction between a child, kindergarten management, kindergarten teachers' reading instruction policies and parents' educational practices. Kaufman and Pianta (2002) introduced a model that denotes the participation and involvement of several parties in a child's education. Both scholars conceptualized the relationship between families, schools, and teachers as an intervention to the transition from preschool to kindergarten. On the other hand, Eccles (2005) found that parents' educational background influences children's attainment.

Moreover, this study also proposed a model of other factors, such as parenting skills, values and knowledge, that intervene in their children's education achievement. Similar to a local study conducted by Azyyati et al. (2023) in one of the urban settings in Malaysia, parents' educational background and parenting practices influence the children's reading skills in Malay language. Hence, the current study would like to investigate factors as suggested by Kaufman and Pianta (2002) in their model of parental involvement, Eccles's model of parental socialization and testing the interaction between sub-systems in Bio-Ecological Theory by Bronfenbrenner (1979). Five (5) exogenous variables are identified as factors in parental involvement dimensions.

Home Reading Literacy Activity

Parents have the biggest influence on children's development. Activities and interactions are encouraged from infancy until the child reaches cognitive maturity. As suggested by Rodriguez and Tamis-LeMonda (2011), children with better supportive learning environments in quantity and quality of stimulation have comparatively larger vocabularies within three years of life than children with less or later stimulation. The concept of home reading activity was addressed by Sénéchal and LeFevre in 2002; either the activity was conducted formally or informally concerning parental SES and educational levels. In recent work, Krijnen et al. (2019) have redefined the home reading activity to home literacy environment from the lens of a didactic approach. The didactic approach refers to a continuum of direct instruction (either formally or informally) applied by parents in reading literacy activities. He provided directions for parents to plan and engage in children's learning. Most studies in reading skills embarked on the Home Literacy Environment as the theoretical framework for learning second or third languages. Little is known to what extent this model might work in the Malay language in Malaysia.

While most studies in the local context focused on home-based literacy activities in English and home-based activities before the first year of school, fewer studies examined the types of literacy activities in Malay at home. Since the Malay language in Malaysia may or may not be the first language at home, it is of utmost importance to monitor this issue. Many times, kindergarten management always places priority on the English language (Jupiter et al., 2021), while the majority of parents prefer Malay-English languages (Fatin & Khazriyati, 2024). The Malaysian National Library concluded Malaysian's reading habits in 2014 that reading magazines was the most preferred, followed by online materials. The least preferred reading materials were the academic journals; concomitantly these materials were only meant for specific people and purposes. This study also mentioned that the level of Malaysians' reading engagement was high and the majority of the Malaysians were active readers.

With this analysis, it is necessary to observe whether Malaysian reading habits are engaged with parents and young children at home. Zainiah (2019) reported on a study on the reading skills module with parents. The result revealed no significant difference between groups, and a possible justification in the study provided by the researcher was the attitude and perception of parents on their involvement with the reading module. On the other hand, Humaira et al. (2020) found parental socialization potentially facilitates children's reading scores, especially when there were high frequencies of mother-child shared reading sessions. As COVID-19 hit countries around the globe, education and socialization among children were affected. For the past 15 months, children have been at home, reviewing and studying subjects through online learning, which brings many challenges for teachers and management (Charanjit et al., 2022). Hence, it is crucial to examine whether parents could delegate reading activities to secure their child's reading proficiency.

Communication between parents and kindergarten management

Effective communication between parents and kindergarten management is one important factor in children's learning. Substantial research examined that strong parental and management partnerships are associated with higher grades, better school engagement, higher motivation in learning and improved academic achievement (Blitch, 2011). Hence, communication needs to be frequent and interactive to instil a sense of shared learning purposes and working together to solve the problem. The quality of communication between these parties is mostly characterized by the parental involvement the management has with the children and families in their care, the approaches that teachers and management interact with the families and teachers' attitudes towards culture, beliefs and values brought in the families (Kim & Sheridan, 2015).

However, different views were found in local studies where local parents' participations were reported in either participate at early or later stages (Harji et al., 2017). Lack of interest, low confidence to engage in reading activity, tight work schedules and freedom for children are among common points shared by parents who are not actively engaged with their child's learning at the beginning years (Abd Raof et al., 2020; Satar et al., 2020). Another important perspective that influenced the educational services offered to the parents is the cultural practices and values that each race brings to their belief system and life practices (Lily Muliana et al., 2014). In most of the local research reports, parent-teacher communication is reported from the perspective of service quality offered by the kindergarten management to their clients (Farah Laili, 2018; Ling et al., 2018). There are also notions that children should not be burdened with academic demands such as assigning extra reading or homework. Yet, volumes of research consistently portrayed continuous support either from learning center to parents and efforts taken by parents to expose learning and reading to their children, continued with teachers' advice have proven that these efforts increase children's readiness for formal learning and develop their confidence in facing challenges in learning (Hamidun et al., 2019). In summary, regarding Malaysian parents' commitments towards children, two important indicators that reflect the level of involvement are the socio-economic status and educational background (Fauziah et al., 2014; Vellymalai, 2011 & 2012b). Hence, this study is relevant to observing current parental involvement towards basic educational activities throughout the pandemic period and examines the pattern of communication.

Teachers' guidelines in reading literacy

The role of the teacher in a child's academic or non-academic development relates to the parental role. As Manning et al. (2019) emphasized, the quality of ECCE teachers should encompass recent content knowledge and quality interaction with colleagues, parents and children (Masnan et al., 2021). However, the dynamics of these qualities among ECCE teachers were almost tolerated during the pandemic years. Hence, this study hypothesized local teachers and parents mainly interact to assist the parents with academic matters, specifically their children's reading skills progress. The importance of parent and teacher interaction is further analyzed by Bindiya and William (2014), who observed the effectiveness of general and specific invitations by teachers and children. They found the latter (children) invitations and instructions marked stronger predictors of parents' motivation to be involved in reading activities at home.

Additionally, parents reported greater engagement at home when they had a greater sense of efficacy in their children's education (Murray et al., 2015). Hence, two important notes that could be considered by teachers, as well as kindergarten administrators, are: (i) initiate more independent educational activities at home rather than asking parents to participate in the program to a greater extent, (ii) strengthen parents' sense of efficacy and encourage them as an important person in their children's education. As mentioned earlier, two strong predictors contributing to parents' involvement in reading activities at home are the parent's educational background and socio-economic status. More emphasis should be given to parents who are from the middle class to lower class as their tendency to ignore and feel 'less likely' to participate is high, especially among parents with their child who live in poverty and deprived in urban areas (UNICEF Malaysia, 2018; Yeo & Chan, 2019). Thus, this study would further examine on the frequency of teachers and parents shared information, knowledge about reading skills, and guidelines concerning children's reading skills in the Malay language.

Interaction between local parents and teachers is mostly documented in parental participation in non-academic activities (Fauziah et al., 2014), parenting programs and workshops (Lily Muliana et al., 2014), literacy activities which include reading, writing and numeracy (Moi Ching, 2012) and

receiving results and final assessment before their children join Standard 1 in primary schools (Rahmatullah et al., 2021). However, the role of parents became more dynamic when schools and learning centers were closed to curb the pandemic. Parents were required not only to be aware of children's work, and online class hours and were assigned to monitor online and homework assigned by teachers. These matters have implicated many Western parents' psychological distress and conflicts (De Jong, 2022; Yildiz et al., 2022). Nevertheless, different perspectives may derive from the Malaysian context. When the Malaysian government decided to lengthen the duration of MCO for Malaysians, teachers and parents had more room to prepare and improve children's learning according to their actual needs (Formosinho, 2021). Nevertheless, the dynamics of parents' and teachers' interaction may be threatened if there are no clear guidelines from teachers to improve children's reading skills, especially for parents who lack facilities (limited internet connection), stuck at their workplace and settings and could not move back and forth due to MCO, and low efficacy belief to teach their own child. Hence, the current study as well may provide insights into teachers' guidance to assist parents in reading activities at home.

Parental teaching beliefs

Usó-Doménech and Nescolarde-Selva (2016) defined belief systems as structures of norms that are interrelated and vary in their degree (according to individuals) in their general existence. As different fields may carry different interpretations of belief systems, specifically in this study, belief system from the psychological perspective is examined. The belief system is the foundation of people's worldviews and is grounded in facts, emotions, reasons, and life experiences. In Brandt (2022) and Oviedo (2022), concerning parents, a belief system is a set of ideas and principles that parents hold in their parenthood and the children's upbringing and delegate impactful results in the child-rearing process. In short, as parents put values and affective motives in reading, the significance of reading will be transferred to their child and will be put into practice casually either at home or elsewhere (Krijnen et al., 2021).

It is important to understand parents' beliefs about teaching, as these beliefs may influence their children's readiness and attitude towards learning to read in the Malay language. Lynch et al. (2006) were among the first researchers to look at parental beliefs about how children learn to read and write before formal enrolment in school. When the parents are involved in the education system, the outcome is usually positive and encouraging, with parents and children becoming connected with similar belief systems and practices (Ceka & Murati, 2016). There is a need to examine parental teaching beliefs, as their role as 'teachers' is particularly important for children's development, especially in becoming good users of language. Much positive feedback from parents with regards to reading activities programs and these reading literacies activities showed positive and significant contributions to the children's reading performances, mostly in the English language, yet the Malay language is put aside (Boivin et al., 2014; Kamaruddin et al., 2018; Normala et al., 2020). Local research findings suggested multiple views on local parents' teaching efficacy beliefs in reading literacy among young children. As previous studies (Azyyati et al., 2023; Fonny Dameaty et al., 2022) acknowledged the parents' education levels and awareness of the importance of early literacy and cognitive abilities, new insights may transcend when the parents were juggling multiple roles at home during MCO.

Authoritative parenting practices

Most research agreed on the influence of authoritative parenting styles on a child's cognitive and positive socio-emotional development. It is reported to be beneficial and associated with several positive outcomes in major children's development domains, namely better academic achievement, positive emotional attainment, and lower behavioural problems (Ulferts, 2020). To date, not much

research regarding parenting styles with young children has been done in local settings. It is also important to understand the nature of authoritative dimensions practiced by the local parents to their young ones, especially within this critical period (5 to 12 years old). Even though the principle of authoritative parenting that is highly responsive and demanding is universally acceptable, studies are proving the definition and application of 'authoritative' differ from one culture to another (Hart et al., 2001; Robinson et al., 1997). Hence, the current thesis would like to extend the possible influence of authoritative parenting on children's reading skills in the Malay language. There are three dimensions of authoritative parenting practice studied in this thesis, namely autonomy granting, connection, and regulation (Robinson et al., 2001).

Since Malaysia is a part of the Asian region, the notion of a 'Tiger Mom' culture in disciplining children is still acceptable (Koong Hean, 2019). As different levels of responsiveness and sense of entitlement are practiced in different cultures, Asian mothers still consider their 'Tiger' behavior as part of authoritarian practices. The idea of 'tiger mom' is still acceptable in certain settings as it comes with benefits in disciplining the child and monitoring academic progress (Keshavarz & Baharuddin, 2009; Masiran, 2022). From the above discussions on parenting and its relation to children's cognitive, biological and socio-emotional development, the major findings suggested authoritative parenting styles should be considered. Findings from local research also provide contradicting parenting practices, either authoritative or authoritarian, among local parents from diverse ethnicities. The current study would like to further engage with authoritative parenting as more positive feedback and implications are presented in children's development in general (Berk, 2017; Foo, 2019).

METHOD

Study design

The study is quantitative research employing a survey design with a correlational design. The objective of the study is to assess the parental involvement model for children's reading skills in the Malay language. The study was conducted in Selangor and utilized a self-administered questionnaire to gather data from parents and reading assessment in the Malay language for six-year-old private kindergarten children.

Instruments

Since this study observed assessing the parental involvement model to children's reading skills in the Malay language, data were gained from parents' regarding their perception of teachers' guidelines in teaching reading, communication between kindergarten management to parents, parents' teaching efficacy beliefs, authoritative parenting practices and home reading literacy activity. The questionnaire for parental involvement was adopted and adapted from Epstein et al. (2002) observing Home to Centre Communication and Teachers' Guidelines in Home Learning. Certain items were adopted from Lynch et al. (1994) on parents' beliefs in literacy activity at home and DeBaryshe (1994) on parental beliefs about reading aloud to young children. The first part of the instrument measures the level of interactions between parents and kindergarten management concerning academic activities and management and the second part observes parental feedback on teachers' guidelines in assisting parents to teach reading at home during kindergarten closure. On the other hand, parental beliefs in reading aloud and literacy activities were measured by parental levels of agreement on the statements. The authoritative parenting practices items were adapted and adopted from Robinson et al. with 0.86 Alpha values and most authoritative parenting items reached at 0.6 factor loading. These items were later tested in the Asian region by Ren et al. (2023) and proved that the items of APP achieved cross-cultural commonality including Malaysia context

The children's reading assessment in the Malay language was adapted from An Early Reading Assessment Battery for Multilingual Learners in Malaysia (Lee et al., 2020). Only three assessments were chosen to meet the study objectives in line with the Malay language syllabus in KSPK. According to Ehri (1998) and Tunmen and Chapmen (2012), word reading is linked closely with spelling development as both processes require a grapheme-phoneme connection. Further explained by Ritchey (2008), letter names, sounds and phonological skills accelerate reading skills and spelling development. Hence, most child development experts suggest early exposure to pre-literacy activities is important as the child will pick up the pre-literacy skills along the development. Hence, for this study, the researcher would like to measure the child's ability to identify and name capital and small letters with their phonological knowledge. In the second assessment, 8 syllables and 12 words were chosen to be read to complement the child's knowledge of syllables that are represented with open and closed syllables. The last assessment requires the child to read complete words.

Participants

This study's respondents are 310 parents paired with their 6-year-old child. There were 35 private kindergartens were selected using a random stratified sampling method. Each private kindergarten is represented by 10 parents and a child aged 6 years old. All parents and their children were from different levels of socioeconomic status, language use at home and parents' education level. The parents were given a set of questionnaires within a week to complete the questionnaire. Within the questionnaire, the consent form was provided and the reading in Malay assessment will only be conducted for 6-year-old children who are permitted by the parents. No special needs children were assessed in this reading assessment.

Analysis of data

The structural regression model analysis showed compliance with the assumption of multivariate normality. The multivariate normality analysis was conducted and the extreme values were taken out (1.3%) with the normal distribution being verified using the skewness and kurtosis (± 2) range. In order to confirm the hypothesized model, the structural equation modelling (SEM) was used and the analyses were conducted using the maximum likelihood procedure. According to Byrne (2001), various indexes were proposed to test the model's fitness, nevertheless, due to the sensitivity of X^2 statistics to sample size, other indexes such as GFI, CFI and TLI were proposed in this study with recommendation values of over .90 (Kline, 2011). In addition, the RMSEA index is also used with a value lower than .08, indicating an acceptable fit and a value of .05 or less is a good fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999). The following statistical analyses were used: SPSS 28 for descriptive statistics and correlational coefficient and AMOS 28 for testing the structural regression model.

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics and correlational between the variables

Before the structural model, Pearson correlational analysis was conducted between the external and internal variables on children's reading skills. Of the data shown in Table 1, it is worth pointing, the value of both constructs, either external or internal, were recorded at fairly low to moderately high. The correlational matrix revealed the presence of significant interrelations between all variables at the $p < .01$ or $p < .05$ level, except for CTH, which did not correlate significantly with either HRLA ($r = .096$, $p > .05$) and CRS ($r = .014$, $p > .05$). The highest direct relationship was seen between APP with CRS ($r = .635$, $p < .01$), between APP with HRLA ($r = .697$, $p < .01$) and APP with TG ($r = .696$, $p < .01$). Majority of the variables revealed a positive and statistically significant correlation with medium to high size effects.

Table 1.

Means, SD, Alphas and Bivariate Correlation Between Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. CTH	1	.307**	.096	.213**	.142*	.014
2. TG		1	.587**	.316**	.696**	.435**
3. HRLA			1	.286**	.697**	.491**
4. TEB				1	.351**	.162**
5. APP					1	.635**
6. CRS						1
M	4.12	3.85	3.95	4.30	4.23	75.85
SD	0.72	0.81	0.81	0.53	0.65	12.37
Alpha	0.93	0.95	0.93	0.90	0.94	0.81

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

Direct and indirect effects between the external and internal variables

The regression coefficient model showed clearer that almost proposed paths achieved significant level ($p < .01$). Thus, two external variables were found to predict 13% of parents teaching beliefs variables with teachers' guidelines and home literacy reading activity showed strongest predictive capacity ($B = 0.17$, $p < .01$). However, teaching efficacy beliefs showed negative and insignificant contribution towards children reading skills ($B = -.07$, $p > .01$). As regards adaptation indicators, CRS was observed to be directly explained by APP ($B = .66$, $p < .01$) but not the TB ($B = -.07$, $p > .01$).

Referring to the indirect effects on the adjustment indicators, the results revealed that TG, HRLA and TG indirectly affect CRS mediated by the TB. In addition, if the APP is added to the path, it functions as a mediating variable of TB, with there being a two-fold mediation effects between CRS and TG ($B = .28$, $p < .01$) and CRS with HRLA ($B = .27$, $p < .01$). In short, external factors from teachers' guidelines, home reading literacy activities, and communication with kindergarten management insignificantly direct influence to parents teaching beliefs ($R^2 = .13$). Nevertheless, these external factors showed larger beta values with the authoritative parenting practices with ($R^2 = .62$). Hence, the authoritative parenting practices manifested its importance to mediate all variables on children reading skills.

Table 2.

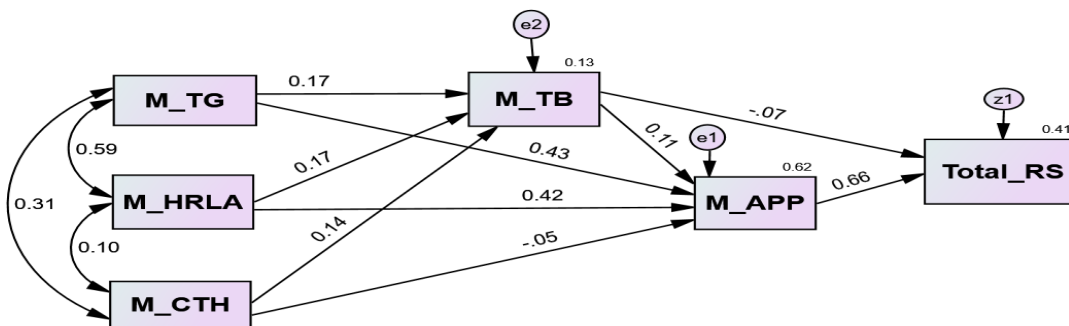
Standardized Direct and Indirect Effects between Internal and External Variables.

	Standardized Beta
<i>Direct effects</i>	
TG → TB	.17
HRLA → TB	.17
CTH → TB	.14
TB → APP	.11
APP → CRS	.63
<i>Indirect effects</i>	
TG → TB → APP	.018
TG → TB → APP → CRS	.287
HRLA → TB → APP	.018
HRLA → TB → APP → CRS	.276

CTH→TB→APP	.015
CTH→TB→APP→CRS	-.025

Parents Teaching Efficacy and Authoritative Parenting Practices as mediating factors to children reading skills in Malay language

Figure 1.
Mediation Analysis



This study observes twofold mediation: parents teaching efficacy and authoritative parenting practices. Per Figure 1, parents' teaching beliefs contribute negatively to the endogenous, while the parents' teaching efficacy paired with authoritative parenting practice, the beta value increases significantly to children's reading skills. Finally, the result revealed that the parents' teaching efficacy showed greater contributions with authoritative parenting practices on children's reading skills than parents' teaching efficacy as the sole mediator between external factors and children's reading skills. In short, Figure 1 depicts the parents' teaching efficacy mediation marked negative variance to children's reading skills, nevertheless when the authoritative parenting practices entered the variance increased significantly in children's reading skills ($B=.66, p<.01$). Hence, these mediation analyses showed that parents' teaching efficacy and parenting practices contribute at different variance levels and the parenting practices showed its significant important to children reading skills in the Malay language.

DISCUSSION

Association between factors affecting on children reading skills

One important finding offered by Öngören (2020) revealed parents' and children's relationship remained stable and positive although the MCO was implemented with different life activities such as education, cooking food, watching educational videos, and playing games. The findings revealed substantial numbers of significant relationships between the observed exogenous variables. As mentioned by Krijnen et al. (2019), the role of home literacy activity is important in assisting children's literacy skills and the observed participants refer to parents who have shown their

inclination towards the proposed variable. Indirectly, the parent's and children's relationship boosts the child's learning motivation and efficacy. It does not only develop the child's reading skills but also increases engagement with parents (Shao & Kang, 2022). Reading skills, for instance, can be a part of socialization and shared activities between parents and their children. In this study, the home reading literacy activities (HRLA) revealed significant relationships between authoritative parenting practices and Malay language reading skills scores. This could be reasoned by the availability of parents, either fathers, mothers or siblings at home, who could assist the children with reading materials. Research by Moneva et al. (2020) revealed parents with clear achievement direction and motivation for their children would develop a positive personality, consistency and determination in a child's learning.

On the other hand, pairing HRLA with Authoritative parenting also revealed positive outcomes in this study. Continuous support and understood demands from parents to their children taught children to set clear goals and regulate their reading activities personally. Although the authoritative practices may refer to parents, the action of authority may also portrayed by siblings. Another important pair revealed in this study is teacher's guidelines (TG) in reading activity. The relationship direction showed between TG and HRLA is moderate with a positive significant influence on children's reading skills. This relationship explains, that when the teacher extends their guidance and advice to parents, there is a higher chance that the HRLA activity occurs at home and this is also revealed in the parental teaching efficacy beliefs. The parents feel confident in their child's home reading assistance with appropriate assistance from teachers. Parental support with the teachers' advice can accelerate children's exposure to the targeted language and interaction with ethnically diverse friends. Using language in an authentic setting is always preferred by language experts to develop a child's resilience for the future (Winston & Chicot, 2016). The authoritative parenting practices also revealed important directions on four exogenous variables, with the strongest association with children's reading skills in the Malay language. Although Malaysian parents are still known for typical traditional parenting practices, more dynamic parenting is preferred by millennial parents (Masiran, 2022). Hence, this study highlighted the influence of APP on selected variables such as HRLA, TG and TB, also approved by the parents. This finding is also in line with Ulfert (2020) who, in her analysis of 21st-century parenting, discovered significant changes in parenting patterns and flexibility in millennial parenting.

Multicultural society and Malay Language

As the TB and APP are handled as mediators in this model, the findings showed both work with different variance values. The analysis revealed that APP portrayed a higher beta value compared with TB; signifying the parents showed agreement on the role of APP in assisting their children's reading skills in the Malay language. The indirect effects also marked the beta value rising significantly with the presence of APP in between the exogenous variables although the parents' TEB beta value is lower than APP. In a nutshell, the APP variable portrayed by parents and siblings marked a significant variance in children's reading skills in the Malay language in a plural society.

Direction for future research

This study examines the contributions of five variables, namely teachers' guidelines in reading literacy activities, home reading literacy activity, communication between parents and kindergarten management, parents teaching beliefs and authoritative parenting practices on children's reading skills in the Malay language. The model is developed based on Bronfenbrenner's theory of Bio-Ecological whereas the theory examines the link between 5 subsystems within a child's development. These variables may not represent each subsystem and it is suggested that future research may consider potential variables from each subsystem so that each linkage can be verified.

The current study was conducted during the movement control period (MCO) due to the pandemic. Hence, there could be limitations in reaching more appropriate and suitable respondents (parents and children). Since most of the kindergartens were re-opened after 1 and a half years of closure and online learning, some parents were still cautious about sending their children to the kindergarten due to health-related issues.

A longitudinal study on this topic might explain properly why and how parents are involved with their children, related to literacy either reading, writing, or calculating. More themes can be derived from the Malay language itself as it is most of the time a language that is taken for granted and only matters when the national examination comes into the picture.

CONCLUSION

This study confirmed that mutual relationships exist between the proposed dimensions of parental involvement as developed by Bronfenbrenner (1979). Although the dimensions may not represent each system in the theory of ecology, the analysis of findings revealed the quality of the relationships between dimensions is significant for a child's development. The proposed parental involvement dimensions model in this study is relevant for the parents and kindergarten management. The knowledge of both could fill the gaps between them. The management can understand and take prior action once the management knows the parents need assistance to teach their children at home and the parents may want to improve their interaction in academic mode in a more non-formal setting. This model also explains the possible actions, plans and considerations for parents and kindergarten management during an emergency period.

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