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PEER PRESSURE AS A MODERATOR IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AMONG MALAYSIAN INDIAN SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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Abstract:

This study investigates the moderating role of peer pressure in the relationship between parental involvement and student engagement among Malaysian Indian secondary school students. Grounded in Astin's Student Involvement Theory (1987), the study examines how various dimensions of parental involvement: supportive, controlling, learning environment management, and participation in homework are interact with peer pressure to shape student behavioural, emotional, and cognitive engagement. Data were collected from 181 Form Two Malaysian Indian students using a structured questionnaire and analysed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM). The findings revealed that peer pressure moderates the relationship between parental involvement and student engagement. Notably, high levels of peer pressure can diminish the effects of parental involvement. The study

highlights the critical need to consider peer dynamics alongside family-based strategies to foster student educational engagement. Implications for educators, parents, and policymakers are discussed, with recommendations for culturally sensitive engagement interventions.

Introduction

Student engagement, encompassing behavioural, emotional, and cognitive dimensions, has long been recognised as an essential factor influencing academic achievement, school retention, and psychosocial development (Fredricks et al., 2019; Whitney et al., 2018). In Malaysia, concerns about disengagement and heightened dropout intentions among secondary school students, particularly within the Malaysian Indian community, have gathered increasing attention from educators and policymakers. These concerns are embedded in broader socio-cultural dynamics, where parental involvement and peer group influences play important roles in shaping adolescents' academic behaviour and motivation (Zakaria et al., 2022).

Parental involvement, which includes management of the home learning environment, emotional support, academic supervision, and engagement with schoolwork, is consistently associated with enhanced student engagement (Yang et al., 2022). Within the Malaysian Indian context, academic success is often perceived as a critical pathway to socio-economic mobility. However, the quality and nature of parental engagement, particularly the balance between supportive and controlling behaviours, can significantly influence student outcomes (Soenens et al., 2020). While supportive parental practices foster intrinsic motivation and positive academic behaviours, controlling approaches may inadvertently stifle autonomy and reduce student engagement.

At the same time, adolescence represents a heightened exposure to peer influence. Peer pressure, especially in its negative form, can lead to disengagement, disobedience of authority, and prioritisation of peer approval over academic commitments (Giletta et al., 2021). Studies in the Malaysian context have reported that peer group influence is linked to reduced participation in homework, increased absenteeism, and diminished classroom engagement among Indian students (Zakaria et al., 2022). Such findings highlight the potential of peer dynamics to disrupt the otherwise beneficial effects of parental involvement on student engagement.

This study is grounded in Astin's (1984) Student Involvement Theory, which posits that student learning and development are directly proportional to how much physical and psychological energy students invest in educational activities. While parental support can facilitate such investment, it is increasingly recognised that negative peer influence also plays a critical role in determining the extent to which students engage in their schooling (Yang et al., 2022; Giletta

et al., 2021). Negative peer pressure may undermine the motivational benefits derived from parental involvement by diverting students' attention and energy away from academic pursuits.

Purpose of the Study

This study examines the moderating role of peer pressure in the relationship between parental involvement and student engagement among Malaysian Indian secondary school students. By investigating how peer pressure influences this relationship, the study seeks to provide insights into the complex interplay between family and peer environments in shaping adolescents' academic engagement.

Research Objectives

1. To determine the effect of parental involvement on student engagement among Malaysian Indian secondary school students.
2. To investigate the moderating effect of peer pressure on the relationship between parental involvement and student engagement.

Research Questions

1. How does parental involvement influence student engagement among Malaysian Indian secondary school students?
2. Does peer pressure moderate the relationship between parental involvement and student engagement?

This study contributes to the existing literature by integrating familial and peer dynamics within a single analytical framework. The findings aim to inform culturally sensitive interventions that engage parents and peer networks to enhance student academic engagement and reduce the risk of disengagement in the Malaysian Indian community.

Literature Review

Parental Involvement and Student Engagement

Parental involvement remains a crucial predictor of student engagement across educational levels and cultural contexts. Contemporary literature categorises parental involvement into four primary forms: supportive engagement, management of the learning environment, controlling behaviour, and assistance with homework (Yang et al., 2022). Numerous studies confirm that supportive parental behaviours positively affect academic performance and enhance students' behavioural and emotional engagement (Núñez et al., 2021; Jules et al., 2020). Such involvement reinforces learning outcomes and nurtures a sense of connectedness between students and their academic goals.

Specifically, Yang et al. (2022) demonstrated that emotional support and supervision from parents encourage discipline and promote consistent academic behaviours. Likewise, Stubbs and Maynard (2017) and Wang et al. (2022) found that cognitively stimulating home environments where parents actively engage in dialogue about learning goals and encourage critical thinking positively influence students' motivation and self-regulated learning. In addition, Barger et al. (2019) and Kim et al. (2020) affirmed that when both parents are balanced and supportive, students report higher levels of emotional well-being and satisfaction with their educational experiences.

However, not all forms of parental involvement yield positive outcomes. Parental control or authoritarian forms of engagement may restrict student autonomy, ultimately contributing to psychological resistance and disengagement from academic tasks (Soenens et al., 2020). Therefore, it is essential to distinguish between the different parental involvement dimensions to understand their varied effects on students' behavioural, emotional, and cognitive engagement. Recognising these distinctions enables educators and parents to foster environments that support student motivation and holistic development.

Dimensions of Student Engagement
Student engagement is typically segmented into three interrelated domains: behavioural, emotional, and cognitive (Fredricks et al., 2019; Liinamaa et al., 2022). Behavioural engagement includes observable actions such as class participation and homework completion (Toro et al., 2021). Emotional engagement reflects enthusiasm, interest, and attachment to learning experiences (Bond et al., 2020; Jin et al., 2019). Cognitive engagement pertains to deeper learning strategies and intellectual investment (Selvarajoo et al., 2023; Lawson et al., 2017). Fredricks et al. (2019) and Prata et al. (2019) assert that these three engagement types mutually reinforce educational resilience. However, variations exist across student populations; for example, socioeconomic hardship may suppress cognitive engagement even when emotional and behavioural engagement remain intact (Mallika et al., 2022).

Peer Pressure as a Moderator
Peer pressure, particularly during adolescence, is a recognised factor influencing behavioural deviance and academic disengagement. Several studies from recent years confirm its detrimental impact on student outcomes. Duell et al. (2022) reported that peer norms often shape adolescents' choices in ways that conflict with parental expectations, weakening self-discipline. Likewise, Hussain (2022) and Tiller et al. (2020) observed that students exposed to persistent peer influence were more susceptible to risky behaviours, diminished time management, and reduced academic motivation.

In the Malaysian context, research by Zakaria et al. (2022) and Kim and Lim (2021) highlighted that negative peer influence contributes to misconduct and disengagement among secondary school students. Yundianto et al. (2021) further explained that peer pressure could moderate and dilute the beneficial effects of parental involvement by pulling students away from educational goals. Giletta et al. (2021) supported this view, noting that adolescents often conform to peer-driven expectations that conflict with academic values, weakening the influence of family-based support structures.

Additionally, peer pressure can disrupt students' emotional well-being. Cruz et al. (2022) found that adolescents exposed to sustained peer influence experienced heightened anxiety, emotional detachment, and lower self-worth. These emotional strains are closely associated with disengagement from school and increased dropout risk. Theoretically, this supports the role of peer pressure as a moderator within the parental involvement–student engagement relationship. As Hayes (2018) suggested, a moderator helps determine the conditions under which a relationship holds. In this study's context, negative peer pressure reduces students' receptivity to constructive parental efforts, ultimately undermining their engagement in school.

Study Contribution

This study contributes to the literature by examining the interplay between parental involvement and peer pressure in shaping student engagement within a culturally specific population of Malaysian Indian secondary school students. It advances existing knowledge in several key ways. First, it disaggregates parental involvement into four distinct dimensions, allowing for a more granular understanding of which aspects of involvement are most effective in promoting student engagement. Second, it conceptualises peer pressure as an opposing moderating force, offering empirical evidence on how adverse peer influence can weaken the benefits of family-based academic support. Third, the study applies a multidimensional engagement framework, which is behavioural, emotional, and cognitive, thereby capturing the full spectrum of student academic investment. By integrating these elements into a single model, the research provides a nuanced, context-sensitive perspective on adolescent educational experiences and informs culturally responsive strategies for educators and policymakers.

Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional research design to explore the moderating effect of peer pressure on the relationship between parental involvement and student engagement among Malaysian Indian secondary school students. The theoretical framework was grounded in Astin's Student Involvement Theory (1984), which asserts that learning outcomes improve when students invest psychological and behavioural energy in academic pursuits. Additionally, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) was used to frame the interaction between individual, familial, and social systems, highlighting the dynamic role of peer groups in influencing student behaviour within the school environment.

The target population consisted of Form Two Malaysian Indian students enrolled in government secondary schools in Selangor. A multistage sampling method selected 181 respondents from 19 schools across five districts: Petaling Perdana, Klang, Hulu Langat, Gombak, and Kuala Selangor. The initial stage involved identifying schools with significant Indian student populations, followed by stratified random sampling to ensure equitable representation across districts. The focus on Form Two students was purposeful, as they are in a formative phase of lower secondary education where behavioural patterns and academic orientation become more stable and measurable.

Data collection was conducted using a structured, self-administered questionnaire in English consisting of a demographic profile, parental involvement, student engagement, and peer pressure. The instrument for parental involvement was adapted from established sources and comprised four subdimensions: supportive involvement, controlling behaviour, learning environment management, and participation with homework, totalling 20 items. Student engagement was measured through 15 behavioural, emotional, and cognitive items. Peer pressure was assessed using 10 items reflecting students' perceptions of negative peer influence, focusing on academic discouragement, peer conformity, and social distractions. All items used a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

Prior to the main data collection, the instrument underwent content validation by three academic experts in educational psychology and measurement. A pilot study involving 30 Form Two Indian students from a separate school was conducted to test reliability and clarity. Minor modifications were made based on feedback, and the final instrument demonstrated

strong internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values of 0.869 (Parental Involvement), 0.847 (Student Engagement), and 0.853 (Peer Pressure). Data were analysed using the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) approach through SmartPLS version 4.0.9.5. The analysis involved two stages: (i) the measurement model to assess indicator reliability, convergent and discriminant validity; and (ii) the structural model to examine direct and moderating effects.

Ethical procedures were strictly followed throughout the research. Approval was obtained from the Ministry of Education Malaysia, the Selangor State Education Department, and relevant school administrators. Parental consent and student assent were acquired before participation. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured by using coded identifiers and limiting data access to the primary researcher. Participation was voluntary, and students were informed of their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. The research adhered to all ethical protocols associated with educational studies involving minors.

Results and Discussion

The structural model assessment confirmed that the proposed relationships among parental involvement, peer pressure, and student engagement were statistically significant. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) was employed to examine the model using SmartPLS version 4.0.9.5. The measurement model was first evaluated to ensure its reliability and validity. All items recorded factor loadings above 0.60, composite reliability values exceeded 0.70, and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values were above the 0.50 threshold. Discriminant validity was confirmed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion, where each construct's square root of AVE was greater than its correlations with other constructs.

Following validation of the measurement model, the structural model revealed a significant positive effect of parental involvement on student engagement ($\beta = 0.488$, $p < 0.001$). This indicates that supportive involvement, homework participation, and effective home learning environments are associated with enhanced behavioural, emotional, and cognitive engagement. These results align with recent findings by Yang et al. (2022), who demonstrated that parental encouragement positively correlates with adolescent academic motivation and effort. Similarly, Keer et al. (2020) found that effective parental involvement strategies contribute meaningfully to student engagement in secondary schools.

This research's central focus, the moderating effect of peer pressure, produced noteworthy results. Peer pressure significantly moderated the relationship between parental involvement and student engagement ($\beta = -0.150$, $p < 0.05$). The adverse interaction effect suggested that increased peer pressure weakens the strength of the relationship between positive parental behaviours and student engagement. In other words, students exposed to higher levels of negative peer influence showed diminished benefits from parental support. This implies that peer influence can hinder parents' academic support effectiveness.

These results reinforce existing scholarship within the Malaysian context. Zakaria et al. (2022) identified peer pressure as a prominent predictor of disengagement in secondary school students, particularly in urban areas where peer conformity tends to be more pronounced. Yundianto et al. (2021) also observed that peer norms can override parental influence, especially when students seek acceptance in groups that devalue academic success. Kim and

Lim (2021) further noted that adolescent students often align with peer expectations, even when such behaviours contradict the values instilled by their parents or guardians.

Further analysis explored how the dimensions of engagement: behavioural, emotional, and cognitive, responded differently to peer influence. Behavioural and emotional engagement were most affected, with students experiencing high peer pressure reporting lower participation in class and weaker emotional attachment to school. This corresponds with Cruz et al. (2022), who found that adolescents facing intense peer pressure reported symptoms of anxiety and social withdrawal, leading to disengagement. On the contrary, cognitive engagement appeared more resilient, suggesting that students' internal learning strategies may remain intact despite external social pressures.

The findings highlight the need to address the broader social environment when designing engagement-based interventions. While parental involvement remains a protective factor, its effectiveness may be diminished in settings where negative peer dynamics dominate. Tiller et al. (2020) noted that adolescent behavioural patterns are influenced by the norms established within peer groups. Therefore, interventions promoting engagement should integrate strategies that foster positive peer networks, such as peer mentoring, collaborative learning, and inclusive co-curricular programmes.

The study also contributes important insights into the socio-cultural dimensions affecting Malaysian Indian students. This demographic may encounter unique peer group expectations prioritising conformity and social cohesion over academic diligence. Hussain (2022) suggested that ethnic minority adolescents often experience complex social pressures that shape their academic identities. Thus, engagement interventions for Malaysian Indian students must be culturally sensitive and tailored to the specific peer dynamics within their school and community contexts.

In summary, the results underscore the dual influence of parental and peer contexts in shaping student engagement. While parental involvement contributes positively to behavioural, emotional, and cognitive engagement, peer pressure can significantly moderate its impact. These findings extend the theoretical understanding of student engagement by incorporating the conditional effects of social environments. From a practical standpoint, they suggest that holistic interventions targeting both families and peer groups are essential for supporting sustained student participation in academic settings.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Studies
While the study offers valuable insights, several limitations should be considered. A cross-sectional research design limits the ability to establish cause-and-effect relationships among parental involvement, peer pressure, and student engagement. Furthermore, the data were obtained through self-administered questionnaires, which may be influenced by social desirability or misreporting, potentially affecting the reliability of responses. The sample, comprising Malaysian Indian secondary school students from selected districts in Selangor, restricts the extent to which the findings can be applied to other ethnicities or geographical contexts. Moreover, the study primarily examined the negative dimensions of peer influence, overlooking the possibility that peer interactions can also serve as a source of academic motivation. Future studies employing longitudinal approaches and including a broader

demographic base may offer deeper insights into the dynamic interplay between familial and peer influences on student engagement.

Conclusion and Recommendation

This study demonstrates that peer pressure can significantly diminish the positive effects of parental involvement on student engagement among Malaysian Indian secondary school students. While supportive parental behaviour generally enhances behavioural, emotional and cognitive engagement, its impact is softened when students are subject to unfavourable peer influences. This finding emphasises the importance of considering students' social context; effective educational strategies must address family and friendship networks to reinforce parental support and resilience against harmful peer dynamics.

Schools should adopt an integrated approach that combines parental engagement with peer-based interventions. Workshops for parents could foster encouragement and autonomy rather than control, while school-led peer mentoring or collaborative activities may help establish a favourable peer climate. Future research, ideally through longitudinal and qualitative methods, would be valuable in tracing how these interactions evolve and in exploring how students experience the combined pressures of home and peer environments. Such insights will be essential for designing culturally sensitive interventions that support sustained student engagement and reduce dropout risk.

Acknowledgment

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