

Parents' Involvement in Young Children's English Language Education Post Pandemic

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Abstract

The importance of English language has been causing major concerns among parents for many decades now and has prompted parents to find alternatives, apart from formal schooling when it comes to children's English language acquisition. Parental involvement in children's education, a phenomenon that has been existing in the Malaysian educational arena has gone multiple transformations prior, during and post the Covid-19 pandemic. Although a vast body of research is available on parental involvement and children's development, in the context of Malaysia very little research has been conducted that exclusively focuses on parental involvement in their children's education of English Language. In view of this context, this research study was therefore undertaken to investigate parents' involvement in teaching English language to their primary school children at home. Apart from gaining insights on whether parents do involve in their children's English language learning at home, the study also examined the methods parents used and found effective. To undertake this study, a set of questionnaires was designed and distributed via e-mail to the clustered sample. 51 parents from primary schools at Port Klang, Selangor participated in this study. Since the survey was conducted online through Google sheet, the data was processed through Spreadsheet-based data analysis to gather findings. Based on the data analysis, the study found that 70.6% parents were directly involved in the teaching of English language at home. Findings also indicated that the of various methods of teaching children, about 62.5% was through technology mainly consisting online-based learning platforms (32.95%) and online printed materials (29.55%). In terms of effective method, parents strongly pointed that they engaged better through interactive learning platforms when opting to teach English to their young children at home mainly due to certain design elements used such as video, audio and gamification-sort of lesson content that can have an impact on learning, motivation, and educational outcomes.

Keywords: Parental Involvement, English Language Education, Primary School Children

Introduction

English language has been a critical aspect in the education systems of many countries around the world as it's the most spoken language globally with over 1.5 billion people speaking English as their second language. English language is also known as an essential tool for communication, social interaction, and academic success, which underscores the need to teach the language from an early age. Knowing and being proficient in English, both verbally and in written form, elevates a person's status in this competitive world. Over the years, the importance of this language has caused major concerns among parents and has instigated parents to find alternatives when it comes to children's English language acquisition. In a fast-moving globalised world, parents tend to seek all sorts of methods in ensuring their children can communicate and write well in English. From enrichment centres or tuitions to personal one-on-one classes were being catered for every child to be efficient in the language. However, the scenario changed altogether with the lockdown imposed during the Covid-19 pandemic. A greater parental involvement was seen during the Covid-19 lockdown where parents took the liberty to ensure their children's education was given equal opportunity, all through online learning. However, online learning which was a rather new educational concept during the Covid-19 pandemic caused children's English literacy level being disrupted immensely especially reading and writing. This caused major concerns not only to teachers but also to parents post covid. Today, in the post covid era, the involvement of parents is again gaining crucial attention especially in matters that promote early acquisition of English in children. Apart from sourcing external professional help, more and more parents are taking interactions in English with their children at home more seriously, and more and more parents are working collaboratively with their children in completing assignments or homework and some even going as far as coaching them through various printed and technology-based materials at home. During the difficult phase of Covid-19, parents have come to a realisation that education is not solely a teacher's responsibility, but parents too are responsible for their children's educational success. Research findings have also affirmed that the higher the level of parental involvement the greater is their children's academic achievement (Epstein and Sander, 2000, 2002; Hotz and Pantano, 2015; Sebastian et al., 2017).

Based on the above context, it is obvious that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact not only on children's English language literacy and education in general, but also brought forward the realization among parents on their involvement. Since students' language proficiency decreased immensely, parents today are relooking at their roles of educating their children at home. While the above details highlight the nature of parental involvement in their children's education before and during the pandemic, in addition to the potential benefit of increased levels of involvement post covid, in the context of Malaysia very little research however has been conducted that exclusively focuses on parental involvement in their children's education of English Language. This research study, which is a fragment of an extensive study on parental involvement in young children's education, was hence undertaken to solely investigate parents' involvement in teaching English language at home. In addition, the study also intended to investigate which methods parents found as effective in teaching English Language to their primary school children. For this reason, this study was designed to investigate the following research questions

1. Do parents teach English Language to their young children at home?

2. What methods do parents use when teaching English Language to their young children at home?
3. Which method parents found the most effective in teaching English Language to their young children at home?

Significance of this Study

Understanding and promoting parent involvement in young children's English language education is crucial for several reasons, as it contributes to the child's overall development and academic success. The findings from this study are important to both the parents and the teachers as it shows the utility and effectiveness of understanding parent involvement which include language development, cultural relevance, creating home-school connection and positive learning behaviour, as well as enhancing a child's social and emotional development. Understanding the dynamics of parent involvement allows educators to establish effective communication channels, share learning objectives, and provide resources that facilitate continued learning beyond the classroom. Early literacy skills are foundational for later academic success. Parents who are actively involved in their child's English language education can support the development of literacy skills such as reading, writing, and comprehension, which then influences the child's learning of other subjects in the preschool. Understanding and promoting parent involvement in young children's English language education is not only beneficial for the child's linguistic development but also contributes to holistic growth, cultural relevance, and a positive attitude towards learning. It establishes a collaborative learning environment that extends beyond the classroom, enhancing the overall educational experience for the child.

Literature Review

English Language education in Malaysia

English language based on the Malaysian education system has been placed as the second language in Malaysia as stated in Article 152 (Hashimah, 2008; Gill, 2002;2013) and is taught alongside Malaysia's national language Bahasa Melayu. Although at the tertiary levels, English is seen as the medium of instruction, at the primary and secondary level, English is placed as the second language and is a compulsory subject where all students are required to pass the English language subject if they wish to extend their studies at the tertiary level.

Over the last few decades, Malaysian English language teaching and learning has undergone three significant changes (Azman, 2016). The very first change occurred in 1982, when the Ministry of Education Malaysian instituted the Integrated English Language Syllabus for Primary School (KBSR) which emphasized communicative language education that included student-centred and use of English in context (Abdul Hakim, et. al., 2018). Unfortunately, due to the poor results in the pedagogical aspects of teaching English communicatively, this approach was phased out (Musa et. al., 2012). A further added problem was that Malaysia's education system was focused on a more exam-oriented pedagogy that greatly emphasised on writing and reading rather than listening and speaking, which were the core elements in the communicative language teaching (CLT) approach.

In the year 2002, another change occurred where the KBSR curriculum was changed to Standard English Language Curriculum for Primary Schools (KSSR). Although the curriculum tried to revive CLT by having an on-going School Based Assessment, it did not work as

expected (Aziz et. al, 2012). In addition to that, emphasis on using English was also done when English for Teaching Mathematics and Science (ETeMS) was introduced in 2002 but that too received the same fate and was later eliminated due to the negative feedback by the teachers upon its implementation (Isa et. al, 2011).

Today, the reform on English Language education in Malaysia is largely based on the release of the English Education Roadmap 2015-2025, which is part of the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025 (Azman, 2016). In the blueprint, the teaching of English through new technologies, the emphasis for teachers professional development, and international standardised assessment for all educational levels was introduced and is being implemented.

Parental Relationship and Involvement

Family relationship impacts children's growth and development in all aspects of physical, emotional, and mental health (Ghanizadeh & Shams, 2007). Parental involvement denotes to a situation where parents are directly involved in the education of their children through schools where they engage, create partnerships, and commit themselves in the learning process and development of their children (Ntekane, 2018). Parental involvement according to Clinton and Hattie (2013) does not just refer to parents questioning about their child's performance in school, but it also takes on a proactive role of creating communication circles with their children, hoping to achieve a healthy relationship with them, so that the process of encouraging, mentoring, leading and inspiring becomes genuine (Clinton & Hattie, 2013; Ntekane, 2018).

Studies on the Positive Impact of Parental Involvement and Academic Success

Parental involvement is a crucial factor in children's academic success and social development because it develops a positive parent-child relationship that establishes a better social and emotional outcome for the children both personally and academically (Eipsten et al., 2002). Parental involvement in education has a positive impact on children's academic achievement, positive attitudes towards learning, and overall well-being, as parental involvement has always been positively related to children's self-efficacy, motivation, and involvement. In fact, research findings in the context of Malaysia as well has established that parental involvement plays a critical role in predicting children's academic success (Burnage, 2019; Singh et al, 2023; Smith et al, 1999; Upali, 2017)

It is essential for educators to actively encourage and facilitate parental involvement in their children's education to promote positive outcomes for the child, such as communicating with the parents about their children's academic progress while also providing them with resources such as reading lists or educational applications for the parents to continuously guide the children at home. Various research has consistently shown that parental involvement plays a critical role in promoting positive academic and social outcomes for children (Leung et al., 2021).

Recent studies post Covid-19 pandemic also indicate parallel findings that parental involvement is associated with higher academic achievement, improved social skills, and reduced behavioural problems in children (Smith & Stoddard, 2022). According to Valk et al (2022), parents who are actively involved in their children's early learning experiences can see

the long-lasting benefits for their academic success and social-emotional development. Annie (2022) also found that parental involvement in children's education is important for a variety of reasons, such as children's academic achievement, social-emotional development, and overall well-being.

Similarly, Pomerantz and Moorman (2019) state that parental involvement is positively associated with children's self-esteem, life satisfaction, and resilience and that there are several factors that influence why parents become involved in their children's education. These factors can include personal beliefs and values, social norms, and school-based factors such as invitations from teachers for a parents-teachers meet or any school programme that is organised by the school and most importantly the need to elevate their children's learning success.

Chen (2020), who investigated the connection between parental involvement and children's academic achievement. also indicates that family involvement can inspire kids to perform well as children's behaviour typically improves when parents are active in a child's life. The study also found that, regardless of a child's socio-economic or cultural background, parental involvement can improve academic performance even if contextual and cultural factors may have an impact on the extent and type of parental involvement.

In Malaysia, an average Malaysian student spends 52% of each day at home and in the community, and 15% of that time is spent at school, according to a 2011 poll by the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE). Children spend most of their time at home and school, so it is widely believed that these settings have a significant impact on how well their children perform academically. As the quality of the children's education will ultimately affect their future, it is crucial that parents and teachers collaborate to ensure that the children receive the best education possible.

Past Studies on Parents' Home-Based Involvement in Malaysia

Although in the context of Malaysia, studies on parental involvement at home with young children has not been vastly researched at the current times, there has been several findings that home-based involvement is the most frequent categorisation of parental involvement used in various preceding studies (Kuan & Chuen, 2017; Latif & Abdullah, 2016; Satar et al., 2020; Vellymalai, 2012a, c; 2013b, 2014; Kamal et al., 2021). Different studies have found home-based involvement constructs defined differently. In a study by Satar et al (2020), the researcher constructed several characteristics of home-based involvement which included spreading motivation through preparing appropriate facilities, creating continual partnerships with teachers to discuss children's interests and abilities, assisting children with homework and possibly discussing education plans with their children. It was also indicated that many parents do also get involved when matters of religion arise with children. Parents also were seen actively involved in students' reading choices and materials as well as participating in community-based activities.

On the other hand, in a previous study done by Latif and Abdullah (2016), the researchers concluded almost similar characteristics to define home-based involvement. Apart from the above, the study further included creating a home learning environment with an emphasis on

social interaction and communication with children, apart from supporting and encouraging children's success. Latif and Abdulllah (2016) emphasized that these constructions are based on the Parents/Caregivers Toolkit developed by the MOE (2012) and aligns with the microsystem element in Bronfenbrenner's model of parental involvement 1979.

Vellymalai (2012a, c, 2013b, 2014) in three separate studies with regards to parental involvement at home highlighted that parental involvement in her study matched Walker et al.'s (2005) model which included discussion of future planning and schooling, identifying academic problems at school and at home, assisting and identifying homework related issues, guidance for examination whilst identifying learning patterns, motivation, and also on time management.

Research Methodology

Research Design

Since the study's respondents were parents of primary school children from Port Klang, Selangor, it was only practical that the study's design was based on quantitative research. The survey approach, in which the researcher gave respondents questionnaires, was chosen as the best research strategy for the study.

Population and Sampling

The study involved the population of primary school parents residing in the district of Port Klang, Selangor. Cluster sampling was used to identify the respondents because the research required certain criteria. The specific criteria included that the parents had at least one primary school-aged child, that parents had assisted or were currently assisting children with their learning of English at home, and that parents had the English proficiency level to be able to answer the questionnaire. A total of 60 questionnaires was distributed, of which only 51 responded. Based on Thomas (2020); Qualtrics (2023) Sample-size Calculator, the response rate for this study yielded a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error (degree of accuracy) of 5%, based on the criteria outlined by the clustered sample of 60 parents from Port Klang, Selangor, Malaysia.

Research Instruments

The survey was developed exclusively by the researcher using a Google worksheet. The questionnaire included twenty items related to parents' involvement in teaching English language at home. The twenty questions were divided into four parts. Part 1 was on participants' demographic. Part 2 to part 4 was related to the respective research questions outlined in this study.

Reliability of the Survey Instrument

According to Fraenkel and Wallen (2006, p. 157), the reliability of a survey instrument is defined as "the consistency of the scores obtained. That is, how consistent they are for each individual from one administration of an instrument to another and from one set of items to another".

Reliability of scores was obtained from the returned pilot questionnaires and was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. Cronbach's alpha is a standard and one of the most widely used reliability estimation indices (Hogan, Benjamin & Brezinski, 2000). The closer the resulting

number is to 1.0, the greater the internal consistency of the items on the scale. Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the reliability of data for all the constructs.

The reliability test for the survey instrument used in this study resulted a Cronbach's alpha of 0.73, which according to George and Mallery (2003) is an acceptable level.

Data Collection Procedures and Analysis

The questionnaire was distributed to the clustered samples and from the 60 samples, only 51 responded successfully. A period of two weeks was allocated for parents to respond to the survey. Since the survey was conducted online through Google sheet, the data was processed through Spreadsheet-based data analysis to gather findings. Descriptive statistics was employed in the study as it allowed the researchers to summarize and present data in a meaningful and concise way.

Findings and Discussion

The findings from the quantitative survey are presented and discussed based on each research question.

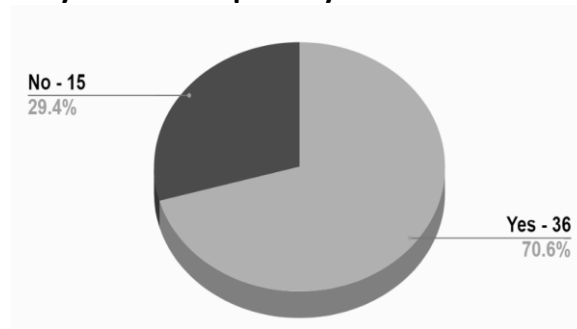
Research Question 1

Do parents teach English Language to their young children at home?

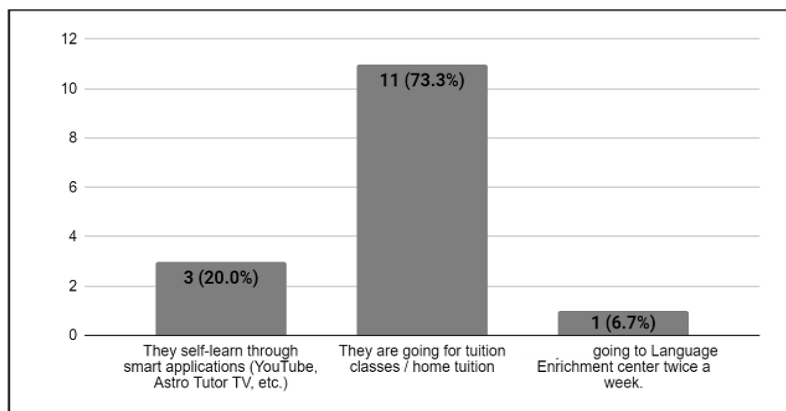
The survey questions which were designed to investigate if parents were involved in teaching their children English Language at home found that 36 parents (70.6%), responded that they do teach their children English at home while 15 parents (29.4%) indicated otherwise (Chart 1).

Chart 1

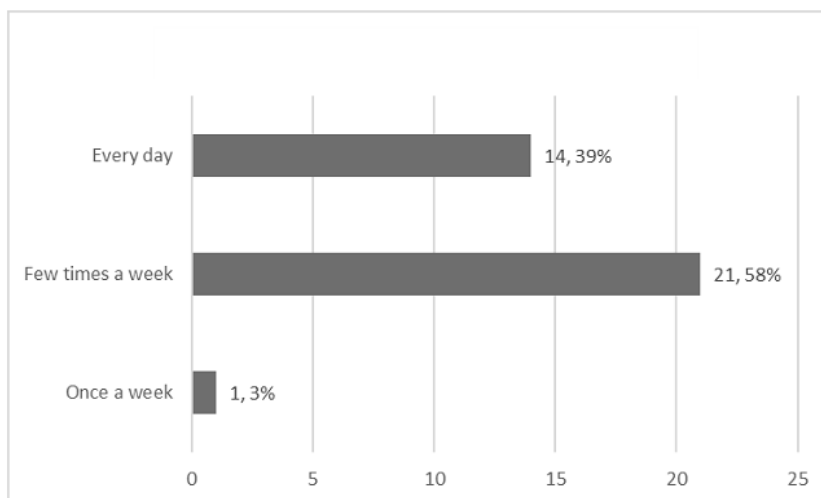
Participants' respond if they teach their primary school children at home.



To get clarification on those who didn't involve at home, a further question was asked to parents who don't teach their children English at home. Based on the responses received (Chart 2), of the 15 parents that responded 'No', 11 parents (73.3%) indicated that they don't teach their children English at home because they prefer sending their children to English tuition and 1 parent (6.7%) indicated that he sends his child to professional English Language enrichment centre, twice weekly for further language enhancement. Whereas the balance 3 parents (20%) responded that their children self-learn through smart applications such as YouTube and Astro Tutor TV to name a few.

Chart 2**Participants' respond to reasons they don't teach children English at home.**

As for parents who were involved in home-based English Language education, questions were also asked to analyse the frequency of times parents teach their children English at home in a week. As shown in Chart 3, of the 36 parents that responded 'Yes', a total of 21 parents (58%), indicated that they teach their children English a few times a week at home, 14 parents (39%) mentioned they teach their children English at home every day while only 1 parent (3%) stated teaching once a week.

Chart 3**Frequency of parents' involvement in teaching English at home**

Findings of this study is parallel to that of Gao Xuseng (2006) which aimed to investigate parents' involvement in learning English in China. Gao's study confirmed that Chinese parents were greatly involved in their children's English Language learning. The study emphasised that parents played a direct role as teachers and facilitators in ensuring appropriate English language proficiency is achieved.

On a different perspective, based on the analysis above, a deeper understanding has evoked with regards to parental involvement in their children's language learning. Although there has been a small percentage that were not directly involved in teaching their children, generally it can be observed that parents do get involved in their young children's English language

development. This study has found that, parents do pave ways for the children to constantly learn be it directly or indirectly. As mentioned in the introduction, parental involvement in children's education prior Covid-19 was not only limited to teaching their children at home but also included many means taken by the parents to ensure their children have access to study outside the school hours, including tuitions and enrichment centres.

Although in this research study we are limiting the scope of parental involvement to teaching their children English at home, it must be agreed that all the respondents have found one way or another to ensure their children are able to harness their English outside of school hours, even though they are not able to spend their personal time to coach and teach their children at home.

Research Question 2

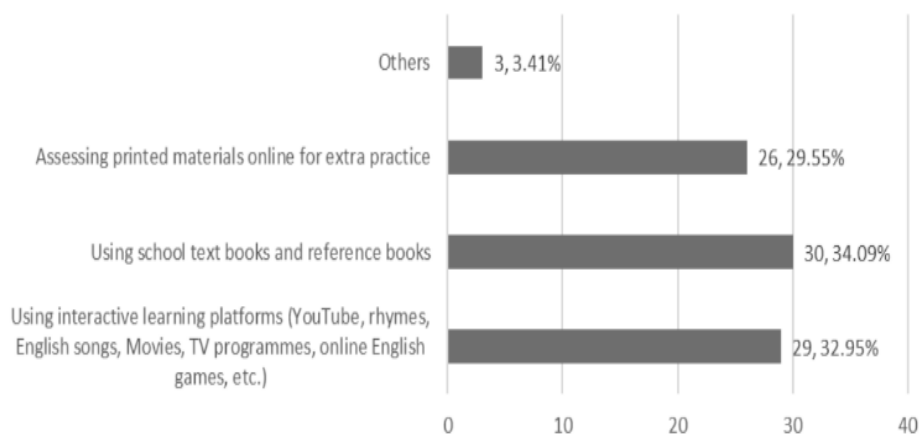
What methods do parents use when teaching English Language to their young children at home?

Data on methods parents used when teaching English Language to their young children at home provided various but interesting information. Since the questionnaire allowed for more than one option, it was obvious that a large part of parents selected teaching using technology (62.5%). As shown in Chart 4, 29 parents (32.95%) indicated using online interactive platforms to teach their children whilst 26 parents (29.55%) selected online printed materials for extra practice as an option to teaching children.

However, there was still about 30 parents (34.09%) who used school textbook and reference books to teach their children English at home whilst only 3 parents (3.41%) selected others, which included playing word-based games such as spelling bee or Simon, reading through audiobooks, and practice speaking and listening through audio-videos.

Chart 4

Method used by parents to teach English to young children at home.



As is known, young children live in a world of pretend play and mimicry and therefore the key to teaching children English is comprehending the fundamentals of language acquisition and utilizing them in a way that keeps kids interested in learning (Hashemi & Azizinezhad, 2011; Aronin & Yelenevskaya, 2022). The findings of this study are also similar to that of Aronin and Yelenevskaya (2022); Hashemi and Azizinezhad (2011); Hidayana and Yakubu (2022) as well as Wati (2016) where several techniques were found similar to teach English to young

children, including using relevant and resourceful age-appropriate school-based materials, online printed materials, learning it in an interactive way through technology, and using technical media for reading, speaking and listening.

As put forward by Hidayana and Yakubu (2022), English can be learned through leisure activities like viewing films and reading books in addition to official schooling and this can be achieved through parents' direct involvement. Parallel to Wati's (2016) findings in a study done on parents involvement in teaching English Language in Aceh, the results in this study also revealed that parents do have a very positive attitude towards English language teaching to their young children as they enthusiastically support their children by educating them through school-based materials, providing learning medias such as English books, and various interactive platforms.

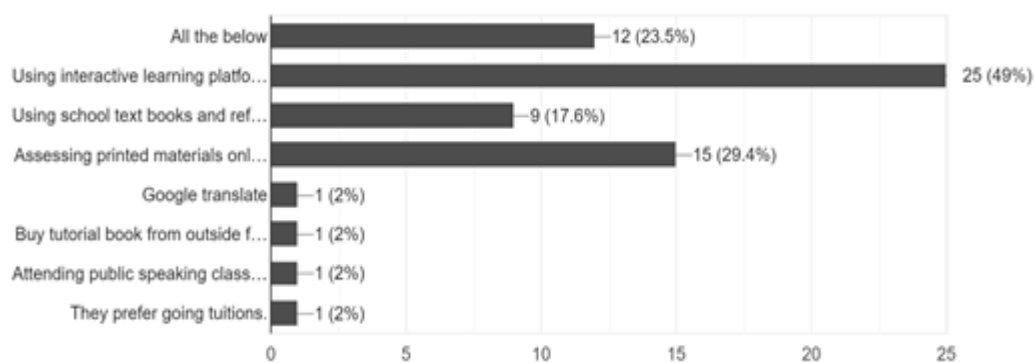
Research Question 3

Which method parents found the most effective in teaching English Language to their young children at home?

Based on parents' experiences of teaching English to their young children at home, the most effective method parents found was through online based methods which included interactive learning platforms and online printed materials. As illustrated in Chart 5, 25 parents (49.0%) felt that of the options provided, they engaged better through interactive learning platforms from ABC Mouse to Lingo Galaxy to Novakids School and so on. A total of 15 parents (29.4%) in addition also selected assessing printed materials from online sources as the second favourable method to teaching English to their young children at home.

Chart 5

Most effective method parents selected in teaching English to young children at home.



23.5% (12 parents) however did not select any prelisted method as the best method rather indicated that the use of interactive platforms, school textbooks and assessing online materials combined makes teaching English at home effective.

In addition, there were also 9 parents (17.6%), who felt that in order to ensure their children's success in English language, school textbooks and school reference books is an effective method to be applied at home.

Alternatively, there are 4 parents (2.0%) who denoted to different methods they find effective in teaching English Language at home which includes using google translations, purchasing tutorial books for further practice at home, attending tuitions and attending public speaking classes is the best method, although the last two wasn't directly related to home-based parental involvement.

The overall finding for the effective methods to teach English at home does align with the current setting, especially with the advent of globalization and technology adaptation. Findings on the most effective method parents use in teaching English language is parallel to the findings of Anggraini et al (2022); Chavez et al (2023); Izci et al (2019); Veblen et al (2018) where use of online based method specifically interactive and fun learning mediums were seen as impactful since certain design elements used in making video, audio and lesson content for children have an impact on learning and educational outcomes.

Just like the findings of this study, a recent study by Chavez et al (2023) on parental support strategies and motivation in aiding their children learn the English language at Philippines also pointed that using multimedia resources was the dominant and effective strategy that the Filipino parents incorporate in teaching the English language to their children. It was also similarly recorded that the use of different strategies like story reading, drawing, asking questions, reflection, and so on to aid the learning of English language were also recorded but in a smaller scale.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Parental involvement in children's education, a phenomenon that has been existing in the Malaysian educational arena has gone multiple transformations prior, during and post the Covid-19 pandemic. Although a vast body of research is available on parental involvement and children's development, in the context of Malaysia very little research has been conducted that exclusively focuses on parental involvement in their children's education of English Language. The current study which was intended to investigate parental involvement and identify the effective methods for teaching English to young children at home provided some very insightful findings that can be further researched using alternative research methods and alternative population and sample size. In this study, analysis showed that of the various methods of teaching children, the major method parents used was through technology mainly consisting online-based learning platforms and online printed materials. As for effective method, parents strongly pointed that they engaged better through interactive learning platforms when opting to teach English to their young children at home. Considerably the study found that certain design elements used such as video, audio and gamification-sort of lesson content was a much-preferred method and parents felt that it had better impact on their teaching, the children's learning, increased motivation between parent and the child, and achievable educational outcomes.

Next Phase

Since this study is a part of a wider research on parents' involvement in their young children's education, the next phase of the study will explore through the mixed method approach on the type of interactive platforms and materials parents used to teach English language to their young children at home and eventually investigate if parents' teaching methods and materials align or do not align with those of their children's English Language teachers.

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