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Grandparents As Educators: A Study Of Socio-Cultural And Religion Perspectives

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Abstract

The modern complex activities make a livelihood becomes a competition between endless wants and limited means. These situations force many biological parents to often exchange their parenting role for economic gains and since the grandparents often old and stay at home to take care of their grandchildren, it is very important to look into their contribution towards grandchildren's totality development. Therefore, the aim of this study is to investigate the contribution of grandparents toward grandchildren's developments in a broad manner, which constitutes the concept of education. The study also examines the contribution of grandparents in grandchildren education in Malaysia across ethnics, sex, state and religion. This study was therefore guided by the following research question: Does grandparents' contribution to grandchildren's education in Malaysia differ significantly across gender, ethnicity, religion, and state. A total number of 201 grandparents were selected from three cities in Malaysia. The cities are Ipoh, Tanjung Malim, and Wilayah Persekutuan. The respondents were randomly selected and participated voluntarily in answering MYOLA parent-grandparent as educator questionnaire which was developed by the researcher. The results of this study show that the grandparents in Malaysia are actively involved in educating and nurturing their grandchildren irrespective of gender, ethnic, religion, and state.

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1. Introduction

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Grandparents are considered to be educators due to a wealth of experiences. They have acquired knowledge about their ancestors, cultures, and their religious belief. Equally, most grandparents are morally upright because they assume that they are spending the last part of their life, of which they need to live a good legacy, thereby abandoning their past negative behaviours and serve as ideal human beings. At this point of time, death of the maternal grandmother and grandfather are associated with decreased grand offspring mortality (Strassmann & Garrard 2011; Jia & Tian 2010). Besides, many grandparents are good communicators of their native language because they know the root of the language; hence they speak undiluted language, which is the opposite of what is in vogue in this modern era. They still possess some domestic skills which some of the present day parents are lacking. All the premises above are sufficient to say that the grandparents could be educators. Dewey (1916) emphasized that education in its broadest definition, is the means through which habits of a group of people sustain from one generation to the next, generally, it occurs through any experience that has a formative effect on the way one thinks, feels, or acts. In its narrow, technical sense, education is the formal process by which society deliberately transmits its accumulated knowledge, skills, customs and values from one generation to another, such as instruction in schools. From this definition one will see that education wishes to build a wholesome person not just an aspect of human being. Uncompromised educational interventions are needed for children especially from rural, with low income and poor education family background, and who are at risk for the development of aggressive behavioral problems.

Sheridan, Haight & Cleeland (2011) applied mixed method to explore the role of grandparents in grandchildren educational development. It was reported that 58% of parents spontaneously described the support that their children received from grandparents, and 26% also described the support that they had received from their own grandparents. The grandchildren and parents' descriptions of grandparents' support suggest how grandparents may protect children from bad behaviour through well parenthood nurturing. This may also promote grandchildren's positive social-emotional development. Promotion of social competence through enjoyable leisure activities will result into healthy adults and non-delinquent peers (Sheridan et al. 2011). One of the important ways through grandparents use to educate their grandchildren is religious thought. In a research conducted by Fletcher in 2004, on the twelve women, who resided at various assisted-living facilities and are distributed among fundamental Christian, Catholic, liberal Protestant, and Jewish faiths found out that differences between and within the groups were the result of the content in belief. These differences have influenced the sufficiency of a belief system to construct life meaning. When belief alone was insufficient, life meaning was supplemented with social and secular interactions. Similarly, Chung et. al. (2005) concurs that a strong parent-adolescent communication may promote healthy sexual development and protect against adolescent sexual risk behaviours. This study found that parents and grandparents felt that values were transmitted best through traditional respect. Noticeably, grandparents and parents often use technologies to communicate and share with their extended family (Tee B. B. & Inkpen 2009). In addition, Jemmott, LeGrand, & Cornelius (2009) show that grandparents as well as their adolescent grandchildren desired open communication about sexuality issues, and that societal pressure makes sexual encounters hard to resist, and felt that they needed assistance with the sexuality communication process.

2. Methodology

A total number of 201 grandparents were selected from three cities in Malaysia. The cities are Ipoh, Tanjung Malim, and Wilayah Persekutuan. Ipoh and Tanjung Malim cities were situated in Perak state while Wilayah Persekutuan is recognized as Malaysia business capital city. The respondents were randomly selected and participated voluntarily in answering the survey questionnaire. They were asked to express their level of agreement or disagreement with the propositions in the survey instrument. The study used MYOLA parent-grandparent as educator questionnaire which was developed by the researcher. Initially, the items and dimensions of MYOLA parent-grandparent as educator questionnaire were generated and derived from the themes of series interview conducted by the researcher. This was followed by extensive analysis of the related literature on parental education. The questionnaire is composed of close-ended statements used to determine the phenomenon that the research aimed to investigate. Furthermore, it comprised two major sections. Section one, formed of eleven items, which requested respondents to provide general demographic information such as gender, age group, race group, state, religion, qualification, nationality and occupation. Section two, comprised of 10 dimensions, they are: 1) religious thought and values, 2) superstition, 3) cultural values, 4) language development, 5) social interaction/ socialization, 6)

morality, 7) education, 8) economics, 9) skill development, and 10) internationalization. Excluding the demographic information of the respondents, the questionnaire consisted of 62 items. A five-point Likert type scale was employed for data collection. The scale is interpreted as: 1= strongly disagree, 2= strongly disagree, 3=neutral, 4 =agree and 5=strongly agree. The English, Malay, Chinese, and Indian versions of MYOLA parent-grandparent as educator questionnaire was distributed after attainment of a considerable scientific procedures including content validity by some experts in educational research followed by reliability, exploratory, and confirmatory factor analysis measures. In analyzing the data obtained from the participants, and with the use of the SPSS, descriptive statistics was used to summarize data while, Independent T-test and ANOVA were used for the parametric statistical part of the study.

3. Finding

3.1 Respondent Distribution

The result shows that sixty-three percent (63%) of the respondents were female grandparents while only thirty-seven percent (37%) were male grandparents. Regarding the respondents' ethnic group, the analysis showed that the majority of the participants (n=90, 45 percent) were Malay grandparents. This is followed by Chinese grandparents (n=80, 40 per cent). Indian grandparents constituted only 13 percent, while other minority ethnics together constituted two percent of the respondents. With respect to the respondents' state of origin, the data indicated that the majority grandparents (n=76, 38 percent) were from Wilayah State. This was followed by Ipoh (n=69, 34 percent) grandparents and Tanjung Malim (n=56, 29 percent). Furthermore, the analysis showed that the majority (n=93, 46 percent) of the respondents, who participated in the study were Muslims. Followed by participants, who identified themselves as Buddhists (n=70, 35 percent), Hindu (n=25, 12 percent), Christian (n=8, 4 percent) and others (n=5, 3 percent) were the smallest denominations represented in this study.

3.2 Grandparents' contribution towards grandchildren's education across gender, ethnics, religion, State

Independent sample T-test was conducted to compare gender scores of grandparents as educators. There was no a statistically significant difference in scores of both grandparents, $t(199) = 0.40$, $p > .109$ (two tailed). The mean for the male was slightly higher ($M = 2.07$, $SD = .421$) compared to the mean for the female respondents ($M = 2.05$, $SD = .373$) indicating that the male grandparents are more concern about educating the grandchildren. According to the results of One-way-Anova, table 1, the ethnic categories of Malay, Chinese, Indian, and others have a significant impact on grandparent involvement in grandchildren schooling, $F(3, 197) = 5.32$, $p < .002$.

Table 1. Anova differences according to ethnic

Differences among Ethnics						Variable	Mean	STD
Grandparents	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	MALAY	1.96	.380
						CHINESE	2.17	.385
Between Groups	2.29	3	.765	5.32	.002	INDIAN	1.98	.373
Within Groups	28.3	197	.144			OTHERS	2.24	.227
Total	30.6	200				MALAY	1.96	.380

Alpha level=0.05

The result also shows that the variation in the contribution or involvement of grandparents according to the ethnics group display is of practical importance. In other words, when it comes to helping grandchildren with their studies,

the level of involvement differs among the ethnic groups in Malaysia. A further look into the posthoc test shows that the Chinese is significantly different from others. However, other minority ethnic group grandparents appear to be more involved in learning activities of the grandchildren than the major ones. Further, One-Way-Analysis of variance test was also conducted to determine differences in grandparents' level of involvement in grandchildren schooling as display in table 2. There is a statistically significant difference in the parental involvement means score among the four religion categories of respondents, $F(4, 196) = 4.10$, $p < .003$. Although table 2 revealed a relatively higher mean score for Buddhist and Christianity religions, in terms of participation in educating grandchildren, the posthoc result indicates that the differences in the mean scores of these two religions and other religion (except Islam) happen by chance. This point to the fact that the involvement of the Muslims grandparents with educating grandchildren is relatively low when compared to grandparents from other religions.

Table 2. Anova differences according to religion

Difference according to religion					Variable	Mean	STD
Grandparents	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Islam	1.97	.381
					Buddhist	2.20	.373
					Hindu	2.00	.365
					Crishten	2.05	.405
Between Groups	4	.592	4.10	.003	Others	1.88	.472
Within Groups	196	.144					
Total	200						

Alpha level=0.05

According to table 3, One-Way-Anova test for respondents mean differences based on State yielded no statistically significant impact, $F(2, 198) = .639$, $p > .529$. This indicates that any small difference that is observed in the means scores, in terms of involvement of grandparents, among the states is not of practical importance.

Table 3. Anova differences according to State

Differences according to State						Variable	Mean	SD
Grandparents	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Ipho	2.08	.401
						Tg. Malim	2.08	.393
						Wilayah	2.01	.381
Between Groups	.196	2	.098	.639	.529			
Within Groups	30.41	198	.154					
Total	30.61	200						

4. Discussion and Implication

The results of this study show that the grandparents in Malaysia are actively involved in educating and nurturing their grandchildren irrespective of gender, ethnic, religion, and state. These results corroborate with the findings of Sheridan, Haight & Cleeland (2011) when they emphasized that grandparents do not only provide their grandchildren with better shelter for good health, but they also promote their grandchildren's positive social-emotional development through supportive relationships. Findings also support the result of Dowshen (2009) where grandparents are described as a facilitator of communication within their grandchildren by telling stories and old tales. Dowshen's results cut across culture, sex, religion affiliations and nationality. It can be concluded from this

study that respective grand children in Malaysia schools would appreciate and be more efficient if their grandparents participate more in educating them. Grandchildren will also reciprocate by focusing more on their studies if their grandparents fully discharge some responsibility towards their schooling. Thus, this work will be of great benefit to Malaysian community, parents and grandparents in particular of the need to be together and substantiate the effort of teachers in bringing effective changes in children learning and the school environment. This will go a long way to improve the general learning of school children as well as an eye-opener to the community of the need collective effort in fostering children's education which was left at the school door for years.

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