

Parental Engagement Through Social Capital Theory in Enhancing Children's Cognitive Development

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Abstract

This paper examines the parental engagement in developing their early age children cognitive development through the lens of social capital. Parental engagement has been extensively studied in regards to early age children's development, however, the broader perspective related to the parental engagement itself is still insufficient. The data were collected from parents of early age children learning in Raudhatul Athfal Al-Barkah. The institution has a long commitment of encouraging parent to fully engage in their children overall development. The results provide how strong relationships among parents and their commitment to support their children cognitive development. The findings reveal that the commitment to engage and being active is firmly influenced by the sense of connectedness to and within the parents, children, and teachers. The opportunities, strength, weakness, and challenges that empower parental engagement are necessary to be taken into account.

Keywords: Parental Engagement, Social Capital, Cognitive Development, Early Childhood.

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Introduction

The main element throughout the early childhood years is parental involvement which significantly contributes to the child's cognitive development [1], [2], [3], [4]. Bronfenbrenner (1979) stated that family is the first and primary social environment in which development can be nurtured and their involvement is essential [5]. Studies on parental involvement support involvement as a series of continuous activities provided for the children.

Several various studies revealed positive relationships between parental involvement and children cognitive development. For example, parental involvement proved to enhance children logical abilities, understanding of math basic concept, and verbal communication skills using educative activities namely puzzle, counting games, and role play [4]. Parents' motivation may encourage or discourage knowledge behaviour in developing their children cognitive development. Conducted in the COVID-19 pandemic era, a research on parents motivation to improve their children cognitive development found there was no significant influence of parents motivation on children's cognitive abilities [6]. Another finding is parental involvement increased children academic achievement by encouraging children to learn, supporting them to reach academic success, reading with them, and discussing about school related matters [6]. Although the latter did not specifically examined cognitive development, however, reading with them was considered as one of the activities to improve children cognitive development.

In relation to this, Coleman has acknowledged the parental involvement to the social capital as quality interactions between parent and their children which is the main indicators providing supportive learning environment in home and communicate intensively with teachers regarding the children development. Further, Coleman explained that parents social capital significantly contribute to their children's educational achievement.

This study explores the dynamics and nature of parental engagement in enhancing their early age children cognitive development. Using Social Capital Theory and applying case study approach, the objective of this study is to provide an in-depth understanding of the family social capital that defined their engagement which has not been studied widely. The research question of this study is how do parents utilize their social capital in enhancing their children's cognitive development?

Literature Review

2.1 Parent Social Capital in Early Age Cognitive Development

The concept of family social capital was introduced by Coleman dated back in 1988 [6]. It is the relation between children and parents and other family members that have relationship with them. In this study, the researcher will only focus on the parents. Parents social capital is the access and attention provided by the parents to build the children's human capital. It defines in three forms that are essential for the children's education : obligations and expectations, pointing out community members shared trust and mutual relationships guide every members to accomplish obligations and expectations; information channels, where access to any kind of information is widely open through social networks; and norms and sanctions, referring to shared values and behavioral expectations that encourage and discourage specific actions. Further, Coleman's highlight the intensity and quality of parent-child relationships and parents-schools relationships will foster a supportive and nurturing learning environment in school and at home.

In the context of education, parent social capital comprises parent's education, abilities, expectations, obligations, norms, values, relationships, and family networks [6]. In relation to this study, cognitive development is one of the prominent development domains that is a focus of attention in education. It is a complex process involving various aspects of thinking and learning. Parental engagement in this aspect undeniably have a positive impact across the

lifespan. Children who grow up with positive parent-child relationships and intense parental engagement that encourage cognitive are likely to develop skills in problem solving, logical thinking, and symbolic thinking. In this study, parents exercise their social capital in improving their children's cognitive development in the areas [7] :

Table 1. Cognitive Development Achievement Level Age 5-6 Years

No	Cognitive Development Achievement
1	Demonstrates exploratory and investigative activities
2	Recognizing differences based on size: "more than"; "less than"; and "most"
3	Recognize cause and effect in the environment
4	Classify objects based on color, shape, and size (3 variations)
5	Classify more objects into similar groups or similar groups, or into pairs of more than two variations
6	Order objects by size from smallest to largest or vice versa
7	Matching numbers with number symbols
8	Representing various objects in the form of pictures or writing

One key form of social capital is the potential to access information within the social relation. It is important before taking any action in achieving any goals. A better understanding on this is when parents have great interest in their children cognitive development. They will search information on how to boost the children's interest in cognitive, how to stimulate the cognitive aspect, what media or methods can be used to support the cognitive and other information related to cognitive development. The information can be obtained from various sources for examples teacher, friends, experts that have knowledge on cognitive development.

Research Methodology

This is a qualitative study utilizing case study approach to examine the parental involvement in developing their children's cognitive development from the lens of social capital. Conducted in Raudhatul Athfal Al-Barkah in Medan in July 2025. The research invited 10 parents whose children are all 6 years old. The qualitative case study methodology is an approach used to gain comprehensive understanding on an issue about one incident, activity, program experienced by a person or one group[8]

Information were primarily collected through focus group discussions and observations. The discussions were semi-structured to provide a natural communication. This approach deeply investigated the parents' involvement in developing their children cognitive development. The non-participant observations provided as supportive information to confirm the primary information gathered from the parents.

The interactive model from Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2018) that included data collection and condensation was used to analyse the data. After the data was collected, it was summarized, coded, and categorized then depicted and verified conclusions. Results and discussions were reviewed and analysed against the theory and elaborated academically.

Results

Parents have multiple roles in their children's lives. Teachers, supporters, counselors, friends, guardians, and most importantly role models. They play a prominent role in childhood cognitive development such as learning numbers, categorizing objects, classifying more than or less than in numbers or objects, and learning new experiences. Parental engagement presented in many forms, such as demonstrating positive behavior, creating study schedule in daily basis, providing supportive learning environment at home, communicating with teachers

regularly, and learning together at home. Parents social capital is one type of educational support that provide fundamental stimulus for children's cognitive development.

Parental engagement takes in many forms that influence their children cognitive development. Children who live in a family that express deep interest in cognitive aspect will followed suit [9]. The support shown by the parents in this study pictured their great support to encourage their children to excel in their cognitive aspect. Parents in this study revealed they are fully involved in their children's education. At home, they will share stories with the children about the activities in school that day, read to them, and help them with their homework. Activities that boost their cognitive development are simple activities in which children engage enthusiastically with their parents. The supportive learning environment at home is significantly contributed to the children's the cognitive development and considered to be similar to the activities they get from school [1], [2], [3].

Parental involvement in school also counted as social capital in which they frequently communicate with the teacher on the children's cognitive development and participate in any kind of school activities [10]. Early age children are generally known as the best imitator, therefore, their parents involvement in their education showed them how parents should act and the children will automatically followed suit [9]. Previous studies presented that a positive parents-child relationship at home is proved by parents' active participation in school as stated by parents below :

"I always ask the teachers on my son's progress in school. I do not have any qualification to teach my son just like the teachers` do therefore I want to make sure that what I did at home is helping my son to progress"

"I drop off and pick up my daughter everyday so I have the chance to talk to her teachers about her cognitive development. I also share with other mothers on how to deal with my daughter when she feels like she does not want to learn. Maybe I need to try different approach or reading materials".

The rest of the parents shared the same stories. They felt the responsibilities to fully engaged in their children's cognitive development. By sharing with other parents on how to support their children's cognitive development is supported by James Coleman. His functionalist view sees social capital facilitates a group of people who live in one structure. [6]. These parents naturally create network as they are on the same journey in raising early age children who needs full support in their cognitive development. Coleman further emphasized that social capital acts in facilitating human capital development, especially children.

Coleman three forms of family social capital that are essential for children's education. However, this study will explore the first tow forms. The last form which is norms and effective sanctions was not suitable to be examined in this study context. The first form is obligations and expectations. This study finds parents understood their obligations to provide early childhood education and assisting their children in learning at home as stated below :

"After dinner everyday, my husband and I accompany our daughter reviewing her lesson from school, doing homework, and learning new material that we prepare beforehand. She is a strict child so it seems we are her students".

"My son is quite diligent but sometimes he prefers to read aloud one book instead of doing his homework. I discuss this with his teachers and we came up with the solution that he is doing his homework right after we get home. So at night he can read any books he likes and his favourite is book about animals".

"My daughter is the youngest and a carefree person. She always has reasons for not doing her homework. After observing her behavior, my husband and I

realized that she likes to study if the materials are placed on the wall and she stands reading or writing on it. So we have a whiteboard, boardmakers, and several learning materials attached to the wall”.

These statements supported by the finding from [4] emphasizing parents significant role in creating supportive learning environment for children’s cognitive development through educative activities. The parents involved in this study have developed daily learning schedule applying their children personal learning methods. This shows they have good knowledge on the importance of cognitive stimulation at home as well as their obligations as parents to support their children’s overall development.

The next form is information channels whereas parents gather information from their social network. They shared information on how to motivate their children to study at home, what kind of stimulation for their children cognitive development, and other things related to the growth and development.

“As a first time mother I really need to educate myself and my husband on how to stimulate our daughter cognitive development. Sharing with the other mothers and the teachers help me a lot. Although in the end I follow how my daughter wants to study at least I had tried many things that I thought might be work, for examples she likes to read and then write it. She spelled the number 10 then write 10 in her book sometimes drew ten things like ten leaves, ten pencils, like that”.

“My son does not like to sit still and learn. I admitted I scolded him many times before I asked his teachers and the other mothers on how to deal with his uniqueness. Then I followed one of the advices to use materials to teach him. So, I taught him numbers, more than, less than using his toys, socks, books and he like it”

“My son is an adventurer. He needs to prove everything. So when I said becareful not to spill his milk on his shirt as it will make it wet he spilled it. I thought I am the only one who has a son like that but turns out some other mothers also experiences the same. So now I study with him by learning by doing and I am happy he learn something new and I am happy that I know how to teach my son at home”.

Parental engagement in their children learning habit at home started with motivation. [11]who studied the parents motivation towards their 5-6 year children cognitive abilities in the Covid-19 pandemic era found out that there was no significant influence of family motivation on their children’s cognitive abilities. This can be interpreted that motivating children since early age is the first prominent step in the children learning process [12], [13]. The children will grow confident in learning and not afraid of trying something new. Once parents are motivated then they will search for information on how to provide supportive learning environment for their children.

These parents interact regardless their backgrounds and sharing emotional support. They relied on each other as reliable sources of children growth and development which include children cognitive development. By communicating and sharing they exchange information, experience, skills, and knowledge [14] . If they were facing problems that need others opinions they would ask the teachers. This supported by Coleman [6] explanation that the quality of realtionships between parents as well as between parents and schools facilitate supportive learning environment. These parents are competent in maximizing their social networks aiming to improving themselves and their children.

The positive parent-child relationships showed from the interviews explained that these parents are present and aware of their crucial existency in their children's lives [15], [16]. As Coleman stated that social capital in the lives of children is the result of positive parent-child relationships and their parents relationships with others. The parents in this study are in the process of developing assets for their children in the future. In the effort to ensure their children's cognitive develop well, these parents participate actively in school meetings and accompanying their children studying at home. This finding similar to the research conducted by [17] that several parents actively engaged in their early age children at home. Both studies showed parents who have strong commitment on their children education would create supportive learning environment at home and referring to Coleman this is the first stage on social capital investment [6]. Parental engagement able to exert a strong influence and provide solid foundation for the children overall development. They serve as prominent role models in demonstrating good habits and wisdom values of how education is important. Thus, children would observe and emulate positive behavior and discipline [18]

The supportiveness of learning environment at home increased with the family social capital that rooted from the positive and supportive family relationships [15], [16], [17]. This means as family social capital increased then parents support would increase as well. The impact of parent social capital is fundamental in facilitating children with various access to opportunities that support their optimal cognitive development.

Conclusion

The findings of this study highlight that parents are resourceful and active in utilizing their social networks with other parents. They use social capital in actively engage in enhancing their children cognitive development. Sharing knowledge, skills, and experiences with other parents on learning methods and materials to improve cognitive development proved that these parents acknowledge each others as reliable and valuable sources. In Coleman's Social Capital Theory, when parents physically present and form positive parent-child relationship, the children will benefit from it because the social capital is exist and strong.

Despite the study limitations, findings answered the research question that parents social capital is linked with positive attitude of understanding their children learning characters and showed it by providing supportive learning environment at home to improve their cognitive development. Moreover, it proposes parents on how to build family social capital by strengthening parent-child relationships and maximizing social networks with other parents could enhance the children's cognitive development. Future intervention studies should consider to effectively cultivate more substantial parental engagement combines Coleman's Social Capital Theory with Epstein's Model of Parental Involvement or Bronfenbrenner's Ecology System Theory. By applying these approach thoroughly, networks and interactions among parents, schools, and the community at large will strengthen social capital as the networks is larger than before, information channels are varied, building trust, and mutual understanding on the ground of children growth and development.

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