

Parent Involvement with Children's Education in Private Elementary Schools in Thailand

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ABSTRACT

Parent involvement in the education of their children is influenced both directly and indirectly by personal and contextual factors. In Thailand, one of the current established educational goals for children is parents becoming involved in the schools. This study is based on the hypothesis that parents' involvement is influenced by their level of attitude toward education, efficacy, perception of opportunities or barriers for contributing, education, and social network. A pilot and a revised survey were utilized in the research. There were 378 parents of sixth-grade students in four Thai private elementary schools located in and around Bangkok responding to a questionnaire focused on the stated variables. Analyses of the data were conducted using descriptive statistics and a path analysis technique. The revised model demonstrates a fit with the data and accounted for 50% of the variance in parent involvement scores. The results of the survey indicate that, in Thailand, parents' efficacy and social network are directly relevant to parent involvement and that efficacy mediated the effects of the other identified variables. This study within the context of an Asian culture, Thailand, could provide the basis for a more active parent-school relationship.

Introduction

In 1999, the Thai government passed the National Education Act, which promoted decentralization as a way to reform Thai education. One purpose of the reform was facilitating student learning by building partnerships between homes, schools, and communities. To accomplish this goal, schools were encouraged to include parents and community members as active partners in the schooling enterprise (National Education Commission, 1999). This approach was supported by research demonstrating the positive effects of parent and community involvement on children's development and school success (Chavkin, 1993; Christenson & Sheridan, 2001; Epstein, 1992).

Most of the research on parent involvement has been conducted in the United States. However, parents in Thailand differ considerably from parents in the United States in terms of their beliefs and customs. Notably, in Thailand, parents have been socialized to believe that school principals and teachers are the individuals who are responsible for deciding all educational matters exclusive of parents' concerns or desires (Morrow, 1991). To examine conditions that might help Thai policy makers understand how Thai parents become active with schools in useful ways, the current study seeks to examine both inter- and intra-parent factors influencing the involvement of parents in Thai schools (Eccles & Harold, 1996). The variables under consideration in the study primarily match those presented in the American models put forth by Grolnick, Benjet, Kuroski, and Apostoleris (1997) and Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995).

Context of the Study

The Needs for Parent and Community Involvement in Thai Schools

Since the passage of the 1999 Act, the involvement of families and communities has become a critical part of the educational reform agenda. All Thai schools are now required to include parent and community representatives on their school boards (National Education Commission, 1999). Nevertheless, acknowledging the importance of parents and involving them in meaningful ways are different. At the present time, the involvement of parents and community representatives on school boards has not been implemented in all schools, especially in active ways. In fact, most Thai schools

still have a bureaucratic organizational culture (Hallinger & Kantamara, 2000). When parents and community members attempt to become involved, they may feel rejected or manipulated by school administrators and teachers, as is often the case in US school districts (Chavkin & Williams, 1988; Epstein, 1995; Epstein & Dauber, 1991). Without understanding what effectively influences parents and community members to become involved with their children's education, therefore, it might be difficult to accomplish the requirement of the Education Act.

Parent Involvement Has a Positive Effect on Achievement

From existing research in developed countries, regardless of family background, parent involvement both at home and at school plays an important role in the educational success of children (e.g., increased academic achievement, improved attendance, and lower dropout rates) (Comer & Haynes, 1991; Epstein, 1995; Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, & Brissie, 1987; Muller, 1993). Epstein (1992), for example, noted that parents who are aware, knowledgeable, encouraging, and involved with their children's education tend to promote their children to succeed in school and to have positive behaviors.

Parent involvement not only benefits children, it also benefits parents and teachers. The findings of some pilot projects implemented in Thailand revealed that parent and community involvement with school was likely to increase both family and community's willingness to provide school resources. Such relationships appeared to benefit Thai children, parents, and teachers as well (Tsang & Wheeler, 1993; Wheeler, Gallagher, McDonough, & Sookpokakit-Namfa, 1997).

However, there is no conclusive evidence demonstrating which types of involvement most clearly relate to positive outcomes for children. Recognizing the complexity of the construct, the current study chose a definition supported by theoretical work, namely the work of Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994). Based on this work, parent involvement is "the dedication of resources by the parent to the child within a given domain" (p. 238), and is measured by parents' perception of their involvement in three domains: the school, the cognitive, and the personal domain.

Various Factors Influencing Parent Involvement

Despite the fact that research shows that parent involvement has a direct and robust effect on student achievement, the relationship is likely to be complex. Some previous studies demonstrate that the effect of parent involvement on student achievement is influenced by parents' socioeconomic status (SES) as measured in terms of their income, education, and occupation (e.g., Carr & Wilson, 1997; Grolnick et al., 1997; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1987). In contrast, other studies indicate little or no relationship between parent involvement and these variables (e.g., Epstein, 1988; Mapp, 2002; Ho & Willms, 1996).

Researchers who subscribe to theories of ecological interconnectedness argue that parent involvement occurs within three overlapping settings: family, community, and school (Grolnick et al., 1997). Their research suggests that engagement in the three settings influences a constellation of mutually reinforcing support mechanisms that, in turn, promote or impede parent involvement. From this perspective, it can be concluded that inter- and intra-familial factors emerging from the three settings are likely to affect levels of parent involvement.

Research supporting the influence of familial involvement points to the strong relationship between parent involvement and parent process or dynamic variables, defined by as variables determining or motivating parents' thoughts or actions (Grolnick et al., 1997; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 1997; Muller & Kurbow, 1993). Such variables included parents' attitude toward education, role construction, efficacy, and perception of opportunities or barriers. A study by Carr and Wilson (1997), for example, found that parents' efficacy was associated with parent involvement. They noted that parents who felt a lack of efficacy were reluctant to become involved with their children's schooling.

Moreover, three additional studies showed that social networking of parents influence their involvement with their children's schooling and, ultimately, with their children's success in school (Hofferth, Boisjoly, & Duncan, 1998; Lareau, 1987; Sheldon, 2002). Sheldon found that even when parental beliefs and background factors were controlled, the social networks of parents could predict levels of parent involvement at home and at

school. Additionally, some research has shown that school policies and teacher attitudes and practices predict levels of parent involvement more strongly than do family status variables such as race, education of parents, family size, marital status, and grade level (Epstein, 1990; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1987; Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, & Burow, 1995; Mapp, 2002).

As indicated above, existing research has identified various factors that seem to affect parent involvement; however, the research findings are inconsistent. No research exactly shows which factors impede and which factors promote parent involvement. This suggests differences in the theoretical perspectives subscribed to by the different researchers.

Early Theories: The Predominant Effect of Socioeconomic Status (SES)

Early research on child rearing devoted more attention to the socioeconomic status (SES) of parents. Operationalized in terms of parents' education, income, and occupation, it was believed this construct represented the most powerful influence on the physical status as well as on the cognitive and social development of children (Duncan & Magnuson, 2003). In the case of achievement, research indicated that students from poor families were twice as likely to repeat a grade or to drop out of high school as other children, and 1.4 times as likely to have learning disabilities. Duncan and Magnuson noted, however, that the relationships identified in this early literature failed to clearly establish a causal link between SES and children's performance. Correlational research could not show if SES affected children's development directly or indirectly through the mediation of variables such as parents' beliefs and parents' behavior (Bornstein & Bradley, 2003). In order to begin to test the proposition that SES was indirectly related to student achievement, researchers proposed more complex theoretical models.

Complex Theoretical Model

The new perspectives focused on aspects other than family status factors (i.e., ascribed characteristics), as major predictors of parent involvement. They hypothesized

that there were many different mechanisms linking parent background or status to parent involvement, which, in turn, affected student outcomes (Eccles & Harold, 1996; Grolnick et al., 1997; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997).

In one study, Grolnick et al. (1997) examined the effects of three sets of hierarchical factors consisting of parent and child characteristics, family context, and teacher practices and attitudes on parent involvement. The results indicated that these factors all influenced parent involvement in children's education. At the same time, parents' SES was also found to correlate positively with parent involvement. The study suggested that several process variables affected parents' involvement. However, the degree to which these variables had an influence was affected by such other family characteristics as family configuration, income, and the gender of the child. In Grolnick et al.'s model, then, ascribed characteristics mediated the influence of process variables in predicting levels of parent involvement.

Another model offered by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler in 1995 suggested that parents become involved in their children's schooling as a result of three constructs: parents' role; parents' efficacy; and parents' perception of invitations, demands, and opportunities for involvement offered by their children or the school. This model focused exclusively on the effects of parents' process and dynamic variables rather than on the effects of parents' status variables (i.e., ascribed characteristics).

Although many researchers acknowledge the importance of parents' process or dynamic variables, few studies have actually investigated their influence (Grossman, Osterman, & Schmelkin, 1999). Thus, in the current study, the researchers propose and test a new parent involvement model with combined features of the two models discussed above. This more complicated model incorporates five casual variables: parents' education, social network, attitude toward education, efficacy, and perception of opportunities or barriers to involvement. The researchers believe that the new model can explain why parents became involved with their children's education.

This Study

The main purpose of the present study was to investigate the direct and indirect effects of these five variables as noted above on parent involvement. Parent involvement was the outcome measured in the study. This was defined in terms of various activities pursued by parents to help their children achieve success derived from the typology of Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994): school, cognitive, and personal. Parents' attitude toward education, self-efficacy, and perception of opportunities or barriers were chosen as primary determinants of parent involvement because previous literatures on parent involvement acknowledged that these variables contributed significantly to variability in levels of parent involvement (e.g., Grolnick et al., 1997; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). In addition, parents' education and social network were included because both are likely to have direct and indirect effects on parent involvement (Carr & Wilson, 1997; Grolnick et al., 1997; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1987; Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, & Brissie, 1992; Lareau, 1987; Sheldon, 2002). Omitting these two variables (i.e., education and social network) would most likely have led to a calculation of biased estimates of the strength of other independent variables in the model.

The new model of parent involvement, resulting from the combination and refinement of these two earlier models proposed by Grolnick et al. (1997) and Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995), is presented in Figure 1. This model formed the foundation for the research design and provided a framework for thinking about the causal processes that might explain the involvement of parents in their children's education.

Following recommendations from Mertler and Vannatta (2002), the study used path analysis techniques to examine these theoretical linkages. The primary focus was on the direct and indirect effects on parent involvement exerted by all independent variables included in the model. However, in order to show how the exogenous variables (i.e., parents' education and parents' social network) mediated the contribution of the three endogenous predictor variables (i.e., parents' attitude toward education, parents' efficacy, and parents' perception of opportunities or barriers), analysis also focused on the influence of these exogenous variables on the endogenous predictor variables.

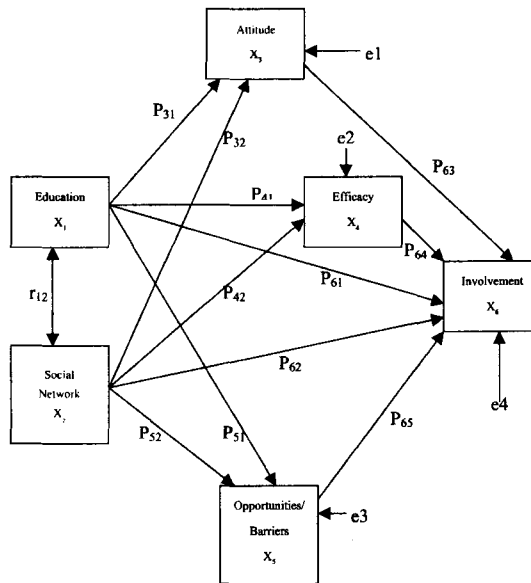


Figure 1 Hypothetical model: Influence of education, social network, Attitude toward education, efficacy, perception of opportunities or barriers on parent involvement.

Hypotheses

There are four hypotheses addressed in this study :

1. There are no significant effects on the attitude toward education of parents caused by their education and social network.
2. There are no significant effects on the efficacy of parents caused by their education and social network.
3. There are no significant effects on the perception of opportunities or barriers to involvement of parents caused by their education and social network.
4. There are no significant effects on the involvement of parents caused by their education, social network, attitude toward education, efficacy, and perception of opportunities or barriers to involvement.

This study is significant in the field of education for many reasons. Particularly, it promotes understanding of parent involvement in children's education in Thailand. If researchers, educators, and national policy makers clearly understand the dynamics supporting parent involvement, they can design school-parent partnership programs that draw on such dynamics to increase parent involvement in children's education. In this

way, parent involvement may become an approach that Thai educators can use to increase children's achievement and to improve their experience in the teaching-learning process. Such an understanding is particularly important in light of recent educational reforms in Thailand (National Education Commission, 1999).

Moreover, the study is significant in terms of methodology. As previously indicated, the linkages among the variables included in the model were formulated on the basis of sound theoretical reasoning. Then, path analysis was used to evaluate how well a set of empirical data fit the model. When testing model fit in this way, the researchers derive results that are more robust than those possible with simpler correlational approaches. The methodology deployed in this study is, therefore, useful in developing a sophisticated understanding of causal processes (de Vaus, 1986).

Methods

Setting

The study was conducted in four private elementary schools located in and around Bangkok. In each of the two locations, a small and a large-sized elementary schools were selected based on three criteria: (a) the heterogeneity of families in terms of wealth, social status, and education, (b) principals having at least a full year as head of the school, and (c) the heterogeneity of the school's gender population.

Sample

Of the 476 parents of sixth-grade students from the four schools invited and willingly participating in the study, 382 parents were used in the initial study due to completely responding to all items of a parent involvement questionnaire. After examining outliers and calculating Mahalanobis distance, the final sample for conducting a series of standard multiple regression analyses included 378 parents.

Measures

The Parent Involvement in Children's Education Questionnaire was used to seek out information about why and in which ways Thai parents choose to become involved in their children's schooling. All statements in the questionnaire were derived from research

literature related to parent involvement in children's education and modified to relate to a Thai context. The instrument was assessed for content and face validity in order to assure that the specific statements represented an accurate sampling of particular bodies of knowledge and measured what they were intended to measure (Hittleman & Simon, 2002). This allowed the researchers to effectively improve on pilot study items.

The parent involvement questionnaire for this study had four sections. The first section of the questionnaire contained eight items (a closed format) to elicit information about parents' background. Participants responded by checking the items that represented their educational background and social network. In sections two to four, four four-point Likert scales were used to obtain respondents' attitude toward education (11 items), perception of opportunities and barriers (12 items), efficacy (17 items), and involvement (17 items). Using Cronbach's alpha to calculate, the scales' reliability. The reliabilities of these four scales were .79, .84, and .79, respectively. These reliabilities revealed that the internal consistency of each scale was relatively high.

In this study, the content validity of questionnaire was assessed through literature related to parent involvement in children's education in Thailand, a neighboring country of Thailand, and available research results in the United States. Furthermore, the three pilot studies allowed the researchers to examine the content validity by reviewing items in the questionnaire to determine the degree to which they represented the sample of interest constructs in the study and to correct ambiguous statements.

Procedure

The instrument was translated into Thai, and then translated back into English by another person who did not see the original English version. The process of reverse translation was employed to ensure that the original intent was preserved (Mertens, 1998). The two English versions of the questionnaire were then evaluated to determine their consistency. Few discrepancies were found in terms of word choice.

The Thai version of the questionnaire along with formal cover letters describing the study was distributed to the four school principals and participating parents. The school principals were asked to provide the number of sixth-grade students enrolled in

the school in order to invite their parents to participate in the study as previously indicated. The participating parents were ensured that all questionnaire responses would be treated anonymously and confidentially. The return rates for parent involvement questionnaires were 98.14%. Thus, it was more than sufficient and it was not necessary to follow up on the rest of the questionnaires from the non-respondents. However, a total of 378 questionnaires were employed to conduct a path analysis that is an additional form and specific application of multiple regression (Mertler & Vannatta, 2002).

Analytic Methods

Two different approaches were utilized in this study. Descriptive statistics were computed to obtain frequency and percentage of parents' exogenous variables including educational background and social network. Also, the means and standard deviations were presented for each endogenous variable including parents' attitude toward education, perception of opportunities or barriers, efficacy, and involvement.

In addition to descriptive statistics, a path analysis was employed to analyze the direct, indirect, and total effects of parent involvement as suggested by Mertler and Vannatta (2002). However, the casual effects as indicated above were not immediately used to test the hypotheses because the hypothetical model needed to be evaluated to fit with the observed data. Mertler and Vannatta suggested that if the differences between the model's reproduced correlations and observed correlations are greater than .05, the model needs to be revised. The rationale behind using the path analysis was that a set of all variables had the causal relationships based on logic, theory, and/or the researchers' experience (Klem, 1995; Mertler & Vannatta, 2002).

Results

Description of Demographic Variables

The results of the descriptive analyses suggest that the majority of private school parents participating in this study have a college degree. Mothers are more than twice as likely as fathers to participate in their children's education. This finding corresponds to findings from previous research, which shows that mothers tend to contribute more to

their children's academic development than do fathers (Eccles & Harold, 1996). As for the social network of parents, parents in this sample tend to have moderately strong ties with other parents in the same school community. The data suggest, however, that parents have few opportunities to interact either in academic or social settings.

Description of Primary Variables

The responses of the parents to the questionnaire reveal attitude strongly supportive of education (see Table 1). Parents showed greater variability with regard to their perception of efficacy (see Table 2) and their perception of opportunities and barriers (see Table 3). There was also considerable variability in levels of parent involvement among responding parents (see Table 4). With respect to the parents' responses, many parents saw themselves as having fairly high confidence in involvement, but as being insufficiently involved with their children's education at school. While parents understood that there were opportunities for their involvement at their children's schools, they tended to be more confident in assuming the traditional role of Thai parents with respect to education, namely involvement at home. Nevertheless, the parents did not feel that school policies and practices were threatening. Interestingly, the inclusion of parent representatives on the school board was not strongly perceived as a useful way for schools to provide parents with increased opportunities for their involvement.

Table 1 Mean and Standard Deviation of Parents' Attitude toward Education (X_3)
(N = 382)

Item	\bar{X}	SD
1. It is important for families to place a high priority on their children's learning.	3.77	.46
2. Children should be encouraged to improve their learning results.	3.62	.53
3. The public should assure that children are able to obtain a quality education.	3.71	.48
4. Children should be educated to their fullest potential.	3.74	.48
5. Only studying within the school boundary is not sufficient for children.	3.49	.59
6. Education is the most essential component to improve people's social status.	3.47	.62
7. Going to school is a worthwhile experience for children.	3.45	.56
8. It is not necessary for people to learn more since whatever will be, it will be.*	3.52	.63
9. Learning enables children to compete in the globalized world.	3.29	.65
10. Children need quality education to achieve higher social status when they grow up.	3.47	.57
11. Quality learning should have a connection with events of the changing world.	3.45	.58
Total	3.51	.32

Note. * The item was reversed score.

Table 2 Mean and Standard Deviation of Parent's Efficacy (X_4) (N = 382)

Item	\bar{X}	SD
1. Be a school volunteer.	1.85	.81
2. Participate in PTA conference/ PTA club or training programs.	2.67	.85
3. Help teachers develop and improve curriculum and instruction.	1.85	.91
4. Help develop school-parent cooperative activities.	2.33	.90
5. Participate in various school events.	2.61	.78
6. Contact teachers for assistance with to your child's learning.	2.43	.93
7. Take your child to libraries, museums or community events.	2.61	.83
8. Limit time for your child to watch TV on weekdays.	2.85	.80
9. Take your child to attend extra academic classes, e.g. math, English etc.	3.10	.84
10. Take your child to attend other special classes, e.g. arts, music etc.	2.55	1.08
11. Check your child's assignments.	3.18	.76
12. Talk with your child about learning, friends, and other problems arising in school.	3.57	.57
13. Encourage your child to respect elders.	3.73	.48
14. Reward your child for a good performance.	3.32	.72
15. Reward when your child behaves well.	3.31	.72
16. Instruct your child to do his/her best.	3.77	.46
17. Listen to what your child has to say.	3.57	.58
Total	2.90	.42

Table 3 Mean and Standard Deviation of Parents' Perception of Opportunities or Barriers to Involvement (X_s) (N = 382)

Item	\bar{X}	SD
1. This school considers parents as important partners in education.	3.27	.71
2. This school frequently organizes PTA conferences/ seminars.	2.96	.68
3. Teachers never ask for assistance from parents.*	2.88	.82
4. When visiting this school, parents feel welcomed and invited.	3.26	.64
5. Appointments with school administrators are quite difficult.*	3.20	.76
6. Teachers in this school strongly endeavor to share school curriculum with parents.	2.44	.85
7. School administrators always encourage parents to be of assistance in the improvement of the quality of education.	2.75	.80
8. Teachers make a strong endeavor to engage parents in school activities.	2.96	.72
9. It is difficult to make an appointment with teachers at this school.*	3.38	.66
10. Teachers make their best effort to discuss school policies and procedures with parents.	2.50	.83
11. There are representatives of parents on the school board.	2.28	.90
12. Teachers seldom provide or spend their time to work with parents.*	2.73	.84
Total	2.89	.41

Note. * The item was reversed score.

Table 4 Mean and Standard Deviation of Parent's Involvement (X_6) (N = 382)

Item	\bar{X}	SD
1. Be a school volunteer.	1.59	.84
2. Participate in PTA conference/ PTA club or training programs.	2.44	.96
3. Help teachers develop and improve curriculum and instruction.	1.37	.68
4. Help develop school-parent cooperative activities.	1.93	.91
5. Participate in various school events.	2.45	.89
6. Contact teachers for assistance with your child's learning.	2.15	.951
7. Take your child to libraries, museums or community events.	2.54	.95
8. Limit time for your child to watch TV on weekdays.	3.05	1.03
9. Take your child to attend extra academic classes, e.g. math, English etc.	3.13	.99
10. Take your child to attend other special classes, e.g. arts, music etc.	2.51	1.20
11. Check your child's assignments.	3.53	.76
12. Talk with your child about learning, friends, and other problems arising in school.	3.69	.61
13. Encourage your child to respect elders.	3.77	.57
14. Reward your child for a good performance.	3.19	.89
15. Reward when your child behaves well.	3.19	.91
16. Instruct your child to do his/her best.	3.78	.58
17. Listen to what your child has to say.	3.68	.62
Total	2.82	.42

Results of the Path Analysis

Before investigating the casual effects, a correlation matrix (see Table 5) was produced. The results of correlational analyses indicated that almost all independent variables included in the model, with the exception of parent education, had significant bi-variate associations with parent involvement. The variable with the strongest relationship to parent involvement was efficacy, followed by social network, attitude toward education, and perception of opportunities and barriers. Because these bi-variate associations were not strong, no evidence of multicollinearity existed.

Table 5 Correlation Matrix for Model (Parent Involvement) Variables (N = 378)

	X ₁	X ₂	X ₃	X ₄	X ₅	X ₆
X ₁	1	.000	.206**	.181**	-.082	.085
X ₂	.000	1	.075	.259**	.103*	.386**
X ₃	.206**	.075	1	.311**	.135**	.186**
X ₄	.181**	.259**	.311**	1	.080	.672**
X ₅	-.082	.103*	.135**	.080	1	.112*
X ₆	.085	.386**	.186**	.672**	.112*	1

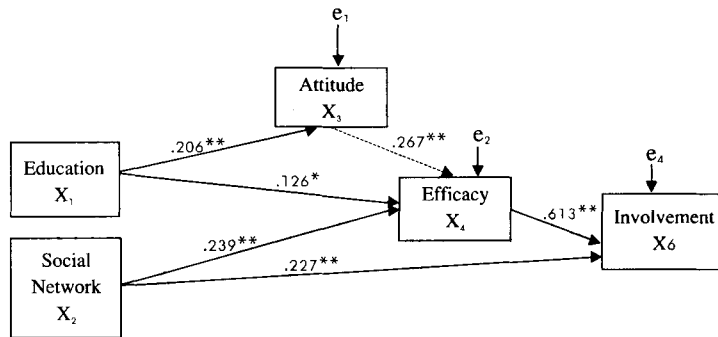
Note. ** p < .01

* p < .05

Preliminary analyses of the initial model as shown in Figure 1, which included two exogenous and four endogenous variables, revealed that the model did not represent the relationships as well as it might due to the differences between the model's reproduced correlations and observed correlations being greater than .05. In particular, the model included an endogenous variable, perception of opportunities or barriers, which did not appear to influence level of parent involvement. Thus, the estimation of path coefficients in the initial model did not accurately describe direct and indirect effects on parent involvement. This finding required the model (and also the hypotheses) to be revised.

For revising the initial model, the original hypotheses related to parents' perception of opportunities and barriers (X₅) was removed. Furthermore, insignificant paths in the model were deleted. Whereas in the initial model attitude toward education (X₃) was

not presumed to predict efficacy (X_4), in the revised model it was incorporated as a predictor of efficacy. Finally, in the revised model, perception of opportunities or barriers was removed (see Figure 2). Figure 2 shows the results of removing insignificant paths and adding a missing path for the revised model.



Note. A revised path is shown with the dashed arrow.

** $p < .001$

* $p < .01$

Figure 2 Path coefficients among education, social network, attitude toward education, efficacy, and parent involvement for the trimmed model.

As a result of these changes, five hypotheses were actually tested:

1. There are no significant direct effects on the involvement of parents caused by their social network and efficacy.
2. There are no significant indirect effects on the involvement of parents caused by their education through efficacy.
3. There are no significant indirect effects on the involvement of parents caused by their education through their attitude toward education and then through efficacy.
4. There are no significant indirect effects on the involvement of parents caused by their social network through efficacy.
5. There are no significant indirect effects on the involvement of parents caused by their attitude toward education through efficacy.

In evaluating the fit of the revised model, the revised model proved to be much more consistent with the empirical data than the initial model. The results of the path

analysis based on the final model do not support all hypotheses. As shown in Figure 2, the final model demonstrates that the four predictors included have significant effects on parent involvement. Among these predictors, efficacy had the strongest direct effect on parent involvement, and also by the fact that it is in turn predicted by so many of the other variables in the model. The second most important predictor is social network, which has a direct effect as well as an indirect effect through efficacy. The combination effect (i.e., direct and indirect influence) of social network is moderately large. The other two predictors, attitude toward education and educational background, provide only small but nevertheless significant indirect effects on parent involvement. Attitude toward education indirectly influences parent involvement through efficacy. Education influences parent involvement in two indirect ways: through its direct effect on efficacy and through its direct effect on attitude, which also has a direct effect on efficacy. Approximately 50% of the variance in parent involvement is explained by the combined set of predictors, with efficacy and social network functioning as the most robust predictors (see Table 6).

Table 6 Direct, Indirect, and Total Effects of Education, Social Network, Attitude toward Education, and Efficacy on Parent Involvement for the Trimmed Model

Outcome	Determinant	Causal Effects		
		Direct	Indirect	Total
Attitude (X_3) ($R^2 = .043$)	Education (X_1)	.206**		.206
Efficacy (X_4) ($R^2 = .168$)	Education (X_1)	.126*	.055	.181
	Social Network (X_2)	.239**	.239	
	Attitude (X_3)	.267**	.267	
Involvement (X_6) ($R^2 = .50$)	Education (X_1)	.111	.111	
	Social Network (X_2)	.227**	.147	.374
	Attitude (X_3)	.164	.164	
	Efficacy (X_4)	.613**	.613	

Note. ** $p < .001$

* $p < .01$

In addition, attitude toward education is shown to be slightly influenced by parents' level of education (about 4%). Education also has a direct effect on efficacy, as does social network and attitude toward education as noted above. These three determinants jointly account for about 17% of the variance in efficacy (see Table 6).

Discussion

Results of the analyses of the final model confirm that both endogenous and exogenous variables help to explain the level of Thai parents' involvement in their children's education. The influential endogenous variables (efficacy, attitude toward education, and perception of opportunities or barriers) and the exogenous variables (education and social network) suggest that both personal and contextual factors influence the level of involvement.

Endogenous Variables

Efficacy

The study suggested that Thai parents tend to become involved in their children's education when they have confidence in their abilities to help their children succeed in school (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; 1997). However, parents perceived their self-efficacy in different ways. While almost all parents considered themselves to have the ability to motivate their children to do their best and to be respectful of teachers and of the learning environment, only some feel capable of providing educational support (e.g., extra academic lessons or help with homework assignments).

In contrast, very few of the involved parents felt confident about providing academic assistance at school, such as volunteering, developing and improving curriculum and instruction, or preparing school-parent relations programs. This finding may suggest that parents in Thailand believe they are better able to help their children with activities at home than they are to help them with activities at school. Among these parents, there seems to be little concern that their lack of involvement at school could have a negative impact on their children's optimal learning. These findings do not fully correspond to recommendations resulting from previous research in the United States,

which suggest that both at-home and at-school involvement are important for students' optimal learning (Epstein, 1988; Henderson, 1988; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1987).

This difference between the two countries may be explained to a large extent by difference in cultural beliefs. As explained by Kaneshige (1973), Podhisita (1985), and Mulder (2000), Thais demonstrate humility and are non-confrontational in their interactions with schools. Even though efficacy among the parents in this study turned out to be relatively high, their direct involvement in schools was nevertheless limited. These findings suggest that in Thailand, the dynamics of parent involvement differ from those that occur in the United States, where high efficacy and high involvement are strongly related (e.g., Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; Swick, 1988).

Attitude toward education

The final model reveals that attitude toward education is not a main predictor of parent involvement as previously expected. This variable offers small, but significant, indirect effects on parent involvement through its effect on parent efficacy. This study suggests that parents with a highly positive attitude toward education are likely to be more confident in their ability to influence their children to succeed in school than those who have a less positive attitude. In turn, parents with higher efficacy tend to become more involved in their children's education as previously noted.

This study supports the perspectives of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) who suggested that parents' positive attitude toward education alone may not be sufficient to influence them to become directly involved in efforts to improve their children's school performance. Parents with a highly positive attitude toward education are likely to become involved if they have previously developed feelings of efficacy with respect to the potential impact of their efforts on their children's school success (Carr & Wilson, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; 1997). Findings from the current study suggest that attitude toward education provides an important lever by which to influence parents' efficacy and ultimately their involvement (see e.g., Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995).

Perception of opportunities or barriers to involvement

The initial model failed to provide evidence supporting the hypothetical associations between parents' perception of opportunities or barriers and their actual involvement. It is worth speculating, however, about why there is no relationship between these two variables. One important reason might be that Thai parents, like Asian parents, traditionally have positive attitude toward school policies and practices because they trust and respect schools to help their children learn to function well as adults (Lam, Ho, & Wong, 2002; Morrow, 1991; Ng, 1999). Thus, they are hesitant to interfere in schools' functioning. In particular, the Thai parents in this study who enrolled their children in private schools generally believe in the value of education and in the ability of schools to foster the academic success of their children. Also, because parents of private school students typically pay tuition, they may be even more likely than other parents to assume that the school knows what is best for their children. Both traditional cultural beliefs and the choice to send their children to private schools may contribute to parents' belief that the school is best positioned to make decisions about their children's education.

Notably, there was little variability in the responses to the items comprising the perception of opportunities and barriers scale: the majority of parents reported positive perception in response to all items. As a result, the distribution represented a restricted range. Perhaps the small magnitude (and lack of significance) of the relationship between perception of opportunity and barriers and parent involvement resulted from this range restriction.

Another possible reason that there was no association between perception of opportunities and barriers and parent involvement may have been that the school made such a little effort to involve parents that parents did not even believe that their involvement was an issue of concern. If schools did make a greater effort, then parents might begin to be more attentive to issues relating to parent involvement (see e.g., Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1995).

Exogenous Variables

Educational background

Research has shown that parents' education is significantly associated with levels of parent involvement. The results of the present study do not provide evidence of a significant direct relationship between Thai parents' education and their involvement. Nevertheless, this study helps extend the findings of previous research (e.g., Carr & Wilson, 1997; Eccles & Harold, 1996; Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994) because it indicates that parents' education might influence their involvement indirectly through its influence on mediating variables (i.e., attitude and efficacy) as shown in the final model in Figure 2.

In the final model, although parent education did not have a direct effect on parent involvement, it did affect some of the endogenous variables in the model, namely attitude and efficacy. Parents with more schooling tended to have a more positive attitude toward education and to exhibit more confidence about providing enrichment opportunities to their children than those with little schooling. The present study suggests that parents' educational background might be improved as a way to develop their efficacy, which in turn would influence their involvement (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1992; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). Thus, parents with little schooling should not be assumed by researchers, policy makers, and school personnel to be less involved than other parents in their children's education (Chavkin & Williams, 1989; Ho & Willms, 1996).

Social network

The results of the current study demonstrate that the social network of parents provides a moderate direct and indirect influence on their involvement. The study suggests that parents who have strong social ties with other parents in the same school community tend also to acquire academic resources from other parents and to use these resources on behalf of their children's learning (Coleman, 1988; Lareau, 1987). Additionally, parents' social network seems to indirectly influence their involvement through its effects on parent efficacy. Parents with stronger social networks tend to

have higher confidence in their ability to help their children succeed, which, in turn, powerfully contributes to their involvement.

Responses to the items comprising the social network scale revealed that half of the participating parents had neither academic nor social connections with other parents. These findings might be explained by the fact that parents in the selected school have little chance to interact with other parents in order to share ideas about academics or even to socialize. These limited opportunities may reflect that fact that both parents, as is the case in many modern households in Thailand, are working to support the family and have no time for establishing relationships with other parents. Perhaps schools do not facilitate such activities for parents to the extent that they might. As a result of these circumstances, few efforts are being made to foster trusting relationships among parents (Coleman, 1988).

In the present study, however, there is no evidence indicating that the level of parent education (one index of SES) is related to their social networks. Thus, less well-educated parents in Thailand should not be assumed to have limited social ties of the sort that might assist them in providing support for their children's education. Probably, Thai cultural beliefs may account for the fact that the SES and social networks of parents in this study were unrelated. Those beliefs seem to emphasize collectivism (Hallinger & Kantamara, 2000). In collectivist cultures, individuals tend to focus on the good of the group rather than solely on their individual attainment. Therefore, even parents with limited education are assumed to be worthy members of the group.

Implications of the Study

Along with findings from previous researchs, the findings of the current study suggest that parent involvement is a complex construct that seems to be influenced by both personal and contextual factors. Several important implications are supported by an understanding of the dynamics influencing parent involvement.

1. As the findings from this study strongly imply, if parents are not motivated to enhance their efficacy, it is unlikely they will become more involved in their children's education. At this point, schools and teachers can assist in increasing levels of parents'

self-efficacy by encouraging participation in educational activities both at school and at home.

2. This study shows that parents' natural social networks may be rather limited. It also implied that school principals and teachers may be culturally unaccustomed to the use of parents' social networks as a way to foster children's learning. Therefore, school personnel may need to learn more about social networks and strategies for building and supporting such networks. They can then help parents develop or expand social networks that specifically focus on providing support for children's learning.

3. The findings also imply that school principals and teachers may only be offering limited opportunities to parents to become engaged in school activities. Districts, therefore, may need to make concerted efforts to train school personnel about parent involvement, including ways to improve parents' levels of involvement and strategies for improving interactions between educators and parents. In addition, methods of improving networking among parents should be addressed.

4. The study suggests that recent educational reforms focusing on partnerships between homes, schools, and communities have not yet been successful. Thai parents and schools tend to work in their own ways, not really in collaboration, to enhance children's learning. This finding implies that the Thai Ministry of Education (MOE) may need to encourage the development of district-wide policies that in turn support efforts at the local level to enhance parent involvement in individual schools.

5. The study shows that the social networks of some Thai parents do not seem to be very strong. This finding suggests that the Thai MOE might find it beneficial to focus efforts on developing policies to encourage the cultivation of social networks within school communities.

Although the study seems to provide support for the recommendations above, these need to be interpreted in reference to the study's limitations. The relevant limitations concern the possibility of sampling bias and the reliability and validity of the results due to relying on self-report measures and using the instruments newly developed by the researchers. The findings from the study, therefore, may reflect idiosyncratic perspectives rather than general ones.

The present study should be viewed as a starting point for demonstrating the dynamics of parent involvement in an Asian country, especially focusing on explaining complex relationships in a Thai context. For future studies related to explaining parent involvement in children's education in Thailand, it would be useful for researchers to conduct additional studies with larger sample sizes from random selections of schools. Such research might first focus on private elementary schools located in both urban and rural provinces. Replicating the model with parents in public elementary schools would help extend the findings of this study. Moreover, longitudinal studies, both ethnographic and quantitative, should be carried out by the Thai MOE in school districts where there are parent involvement programs. The purpose of such studies might be to document what happens when parents become more involved with their children's education in terms of family life and educational outcomes.

Summary

The final model of parent involvement tested in the present study highlighted four parent variables, namely education, social network, attitude toward education, and efficacy, that have the potential to impact parent involvement programs. In particular, emphasis was placed on the efficacy and social network of parents because these two variables had the strongest influence on parent involvement.

Although findings from this research support recommendations for the development and implementation of parent involvement programs, the study does not make recommendations regarding the exact content of such programs. These issues ought properly to be determined locally, in consideration of the demographic characteristics of the school community and the resources available to support program implementation. Some considerations, however, apply to the Thai context more generally, and these are presented to support recommendations to policy makers, researchers, and school educators.

In spite of several limitations, the present study adds to the corpus of literature on parent involvement, especially for Thailand, by presenting a model that can facilitate endeavors to understand and enhance parent involvement. Additionally, the recommendations offer guidance for further practices and research in the area of parent involvement in

children's education to improve the educational outcomes as a result of increasing levels of parent involvement.

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