

***Parental Home-based Support and Educational Outlook
towards Primary School Children in Urban Mongolia***

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Abstract

For the past decades, the enrollment rate of primary school has been increasing in developing countries.

Unfortunately, due to problems such as lack of classrooms, textbooks, and school facilities, as well as qualified human resources, a quality education can be difficult to obtain. Providing quality education is a key issue especially in rural areas and in urban slum areas. Research demonstrates that not only schools but also parents and communities play a significant role in supporting quality education.

This study focuses on primary school students and their families in the capital city of Mongolia, where a rapid population increase has caused serious problems at school. The purpose of this study is to analyze the correlations between parental home-based support, parent's educational outlook towards their children, and the children's school performance.

There are two major datasets collected during 2016 in slum areas of Ulaanbaatar; one set comprised of semi-structured interviews of teachers, and the other created from a questionnaire survey of 8 schools. Analysis of the data shows that most parents work during the daytime and are not able to spend long hours with their children at home. Parental outlook on education and their ability to communicate educational values to their children varied. Even so, the more parents talked about their children's future at home, the more their children were motivated to study. Further research will clarify the influence and impact of parental home-based support on children's education.

Keywords: parental support, quality education, urban slum areas, Mongolia

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Introduction

Due to a lot of effort to promote basic education worldwide, adjusted net enrollment rate in primary education reached 91% in 2014 (UNESCO, 2016). However, when we look at the quality of education, there are many obstacles that children face in the context of school facilities, teachers, and student home environment. According to UNICEF (2016), “38% of children leave primary school without learning how to read, write, and do simple-arithmetic (UNICEF, 2016: 42).” Parents encourage their children to go to school, expecting them to learn basic skills for life, but if they don’t learn how to read, write, and calculate, then what is the purpose for these children to go to school?

This study focuses on primary school students and their families in Ulaanbaatar, the capital city of Mongolia. In the suburb of Ulaanbaatar, there are slum-like areas, Ger areas, where a rapid population increase has caused serious problems in schools such as the scarcity of classrooms, facilities, and textbooks. Even though the learning environment is harsh and quality education seems difficult to obtain, a certain number of students perform well at school. On the other hand, based on the semi-structured interviews with teachers, there are a number of students who have difficulties in learning, and in fact, approximately 50% of students’ caregivers, who answered the questionnaires, feel that their children are slow learners and have difficulties in school. The purpose of this study is to analyze the correlations between parental home-based support, parent’s educational outlook for their children, and children’s school performance.

Parental Involvement in children’s education

A significant number of studies show that parental involvement in children’s education is closely related to the children’s academic performance. The positive influences of parental involvement on academic achievement have been reported by several review articles of previous studies and meta-analyses of the literature on the effects of parental involvement (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1997; Fan and Chen, 2001; Mayo and Siraj, 2014; Wilder, 2014; See and Gorard, 2015; Jeynes, 2017). At the same time, Fan and Chen (2001) argued that research findings in the field of parental involvement had been inconsistent in that some studies showed evidence of a positive effect on school learning, while others found little effect, and only a small number of empirically based studies existed in this field. In an effort to understand correlations between parental involvement and education, researchers have proposed different models of parental involvement in children’s education. For example, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) suggested model of parental involvement process from level 1 to 5: level 1 is a parent’s basic involvement decision, level 2 is a parent’s choice of involvement forms, level 3 is the mechanism through which parental involvement occurs, level 4 is tempering / mediating variables, and level 5 is child / student outcomes. Another study focuses on parenting style or caregivers’ behavior. Ule, Zivoder, and Bois-Reymond (2015) classified parental involvement in four behavioral aspects: parental educational aspirations and future plans for their children, the role of parents in decision-making in educational transitions and trajectories, parental participation in the school, and parental support with schoolwork.

Despite the favorable influence on children's educational trajectories, there are overt barriers to parental involvement. Hornby and Lafaele (2011) reported in their review article that "[parental involvement] is shaped and limited by a divergent range of barriers related to parents and families, children, parent-teacher differences and societal issues." (Hornby and Lafaele, 2011: 50). When it comes to the barriers related to societal issues, children and families living in disadvantaged areas are more likely to face challenging educational situations. In many developing countries, in general, the school environment for basic education is insufficient. Issues regarding unqualified teachers, lack of classrooms, facilities, and textbooks, little communication between parents and teachers, and few interactions among neighbors, make it more difficult for children to obtain a quality education. Therefore, it is harder for these children to attain academic achievement than those living in more advantaged areas. In reference to parental involvement in children's education, Mayo and Siraj (2015) suggested that "some working-class parents use their personal experiences to diverge from the traditional pattern of socialisation through accomplishment of natural growth. Instead, they create a family environment that actively and effectively supports children's well-being and academic achievement." In this context, parental involvement can be a means of supporting academic performance for students in disadvantaged conditions.

Studies on parental involvement have been done in various different regions of the world. Ule, Zivoder, and Bois-Reymond (2015) conducted semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews in 8 countries in Europe: Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Netherland, Poland, Slovakia, and the U.K., and their study demonstrated patterns of parental involvement in education. Niia, Brunberg, and Granlund (2015) investigated through a questionnaire survey to 13 to 15 year-old students and their parents in Sweden, and found that parents' involvement in school correlated negatively with the academic achievement of the student, presumably because parents of underachieving students communicated more frequently with the schools than students with high academic performance. Dumont *et al.* (2012) collected more than 1,000 samples in Germany and Switzerland respectively to research the relations between family background and educational outcomes, with specific focuses on parental homework involvement. More findings in the United States were reported by Jeynes (2017), who examined the relation between parental involvement with Latino youths and kindergarten to college freshman student achievement, and by Neymotin (2014), who examined the impact of parental involvement measures on the behavioral outcomes of high-school students in the U.S. Furthermore, Khajehpour and Ghazvini (2011) studied the role that parental involvement plays in children's academic performance in Iran, based on a dataset collected from a questionnaire given to 200 boys, the results of which indicated those who were involved in more home-type support (e.g. checking child's programming, talking to the child at home about school related topics, or engaging in educational activities outside of school) had better grades. Most studies of the role of parental involvement were conducted in Europe and the United States, and few have been conducted in developing countries in Asia or other regions. It is fair to say that in-depth research of parental involvement in disadvantaged areas, especially in developing countries, should be the next agenda in order to clarify the impact of parental home-based support on children's education.

Disadvantages in urban slum-like suburbs in Mongolia

Mongolia is recognized as having a large population of nomadic herders. In 2015, approximately 18% of households in the country were herders (National Registration and Statistics Office of Mongolia, 2015), and they usually live in the countryside with their livestock. In recent years, more and more nomadic herder families have moved to the slum-like suburbs, or Ger areas, of the capital city, Ulaanbaatar, because they had lost their livestock due to severe cold in winter. Since there are few job opportunities in rural areas, ex-herders have tended to move to the city, seeking new jobs and new lives. But in reality, they only find simple low-paid work such as private taxi drivers, public work contractors, cooks, and small shop owners, or in many cases, they remain unemployed for years. Due to this problem, a lot of newcomers move to the Ger areas and settle down, which has resulted in a rapid population increase. In 2015, about 1.4 million citizens live in the capital city, which is roughly 45.6% of the country's population (National Registration and Statistics Office of Mongolia, 2015).

Congestion of the population in Ger areas has caused serious problems in education. Most public primary schools in Ger areas have to organize two to four shifts of classes due to the scarcity of classrooms. For example, the first shift classes are from 8:00 to 12:00, the second classes are from 12:30 to 16:00, and the third classes are from 15:30 to 19:00. In the periphery of Ger areas, where infrastructure is in poor condition, there is no electricity along the road or in residences. It is therefore unsafe for children to walk home from school at night in total darkness. Moreover, during the long and cold winter, when the temperatures drops around minus 40 degrees, frozen unpaved roads in residential areas are too dangerous for younger children to walk early in the morning or late at night.

Not only are there not enough classrooms, but also the school facilities, and learning materials are insufficient. In overpopulated schools, the government cannot provide enough textbooks. Only one out of three or four students is able to have their own textbooks, while the rest of the students have to borrow from friends or obtain used textbooks from senior students. It is even difficult for students to find and buy textbooks in their communities. Under such harsh conditions, school teachers reported that there is a number of students who cannot catch up with studying at school and who are likely to drop out of school in the future.

Unfortunately, there are few studies about parental home-based support for children's education in Mongolia, however, taking into consideration the fact that a certain number of students in Ger areas perform better than the other students in the same school and with the same educational environment, there must be some influence on school performance caused by students' home background. This article aims to analyze the relation between parental home-based support and children's school performance in urban Mongolia.

Research Overview

In order to research disadvantaged Ger areas in Ulaanbaatar, this study looks at two districts, Chingertei District and Songinokhailkhan District. These two districts are two major densely populated districts in the capital city, encompassing wide Ger areas. In Chingertei District, there were 14 primary schools as of 2014, while there were 16 in Songinokhailkhan District.

In September and November, 2016, semi-structured interviews with school principals and primary school managers were conducted in 10 primary schools, 5 in Chingertei and 5 in Songinokhaikhan District. Then a questionnaire survey was conducted in 8 primary schools, targeting the 2nd graders' caregivers and the 5th graders' caregivers. S

The sample size of the questionnaire survey is 1,749 in total, 857 caregivers in Chingertei and 892 caregivers in Songinokhaikhan.

Issues for the families of the students in Ger areas

According to the semi-structured interviews with school principals and primary school managers, a lot of issues were illustrated regarding the families of the students in Ger areas. A complex convergence of their living conditions, family background, and school related problems have hindered quality education in these areas.

Issues for the parents and caregivers of the students

Employed parents usually work long hours (days and nights) to make a living and therefore have little time to spend at home. On the other hand, unemployed parents tend to drink a lot of alcohol thereby alcoholic mothers as well as fathers are increasing in recent years. These alcoholic parents are reluctant to come to school to meet teachers. As described earlier, many new comers settle down the Ger areas and they have weak social networks. Because of the weak social networks, absences from community during daytime due to work, or alcoholism and other problems, a certain number of parents rarely come to school to attend parents' meetings or even to pick their children up after evening classes.

Issues for the students

Students in Ger areas experience more struggles in terms of home and school environment than those in more advantaged areas in the capital city. They have to spend many hours doing household chores, such as fetching water from water stations, shopping, cleaning, and cooking in order to help their busy mothers and fathers. They usually have classes half a day due to the several shifts of school classes, furthermore there are no spare classrooms or facilities for students to have club activities or to play with friends after school. In addition to these issues, they face the problem of insufficient learning materials, including textbooks and other books. Especially for the students in poor families who cannot afford to buy learning materials, their learning environment at home is scarcely equipped.

The relations between parental home-based support and children's school performance

There is another dataset, collected during 2016 in Ger areas of Ulaanbaatar, which was created from a questionnaire survey of 8 primary schools. Table 1. and Table 2. show the sample size in both Districts. Table 3. and Table 4. show the age groups of 2nd graders' caregivers and 5th graders' caregivers respectively.

Table 1. Sample Size in Chingertei District

Category	School No. 37	School No. 39	School No. 49	School No. 72	Total (persons)
2 nd graders' Caregivers	144	73	66	245	528
5 th graders' Caregivers	144	102	59	24	329
Total	288	175	125	269	857

Table 2. Sample Size in Songinokhailkhan District

Category	School No. 42	School No. 65	School No. 106	School No. 122	Total (persons)
2 nd graders' Caregivers	239	193	0	30	462
5 th graders' Caregivers	128	185	60	57	430
Total	367	378	60	87	892

Table 3. Age Group of Caregivers in Chingertei District

Age group	Male (n=224)		Female (n=529)		unanswered (n=104)	
		%		%		%
18-19	6	3%	5	1%	0	0%
20-29	33	15%	77	15%	3	3%
30-39	99	44%	284	54%	1	1%
40-49	59	26%	111	21%	0	0%
50-59	16	7%	25	5%	0	0%
60-69	3	1%	8	2%	1	1%
70-	1	0%	0	0%	0	0%
unanswered	7	3%	19	4%	99	95%

Table 4. Age Group of Caregivers in Songinokhailkhan District

	Male (n=270)		Female (n=548)		unanswered (n=74)	
		%		%		%
Age group						
18-19	2	1%	8	1%	0	0%
20-29	38	14%	97	18%	1	1%
30-39	148	55%	279	51%	4	5%
40-49	58	21%	121	22%	4	5%
50-59	15	6%	19	3%	0	0%
60-69	1	0%	5	1%	0	0%
70-	1	0%	0	0%	0	0%
unanswered	7	3%	19	3%	65	88%

Table 3. and 4. indicate that the majority of caregivers are in their 30's and 40's. Therefore, it is presumable that approximately 80% or more of those who answered the questionnaire are the students' mothers and fathers. The survey also indicates that 11% of male and 44% of female caregivers of 2nd graders are unemployed in Songinokhailkhan, while 18% of male and 36% of female caregivers of 2nd graders are unemployed in Chingertei. These percentages are higher than the national unemployment rate of 7.5% (National Registration and Statistics Office of Mongolia, 2015). When we look at the unemployment rates of 5th graders' caregivers, the numbers are slightly lower than that of 2nd graders', but still much higher than the national average. This means families living in Ger areas are classified as having low social economic status in Mongolia.

The questionnaire survey comprises a variety of questions ranging from caregivers' educational background to how they interact with their children at home. To examine the relations between parental home-based support and children's school performance, the main focus was placed upon how and what caregivers do to encourage their children's education at home and one specific question, "Is it too difficult for your children to catch up with the lesson at school?" For this question, those who answered "True." or "Partially true." among the 2nd graders' caregivers were 47%, while those among the 5th graders' caregivers were as high as 52%.

To analyze the possible relation between caregivers' home-based support as well as their background and children's school performance, multiple regression analyses were conducted. For analysis 1, three independent variables: caregivers' years in school (educational background), caregivers' spouses' years in school, and support for home-based early childhood education (ECE), were placed. The result shows that the 2nd graders, whose caregivers' spouses spent more time in school than other spouses, and whose caregivers supported more home-based ECE, have fewer difficulties in studying at primary schools (statistically significant: $p < .05$). Table 5. and 6. show the caregivers' educational background. It is obvious that male caregivers have fewer years in school than female caregivers. This explains the similar tendency of national educational background of male and female comparison. In 2015, the male

gross enrolment ratio of secondary schools (6-9th grades) is 96.0%, whereas the female gross enrolment ratio is 99.3% (National Registration and Statistics Office of Mongolia, 2015). Considering that caregivers who answered the questionnaire survey were mostly female, the mothers' educational background has a little influence on the child's school performance. In contrast, the caregivers' spouses' (mostly the fathers') educational background has greater influence on the child's school performance.

Table 5. Caregivers' Educational Background in Chingertei District

	Male (n=224)		Female (n=529)		unanswered (n=104)	
		%		%		%
Education (years in school)						
0	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
1-4 (primary drop-out)	9	4%	8	2%	4	4%
5 (primary)	2	1%	4	1%	0	0%
6-8 (lower secondary)	53	24%	94	18%	5	5%
9-10 (upper secondary)	117	52%	281	53%	11	11%
11-14 (higher)	28	13%	86	16%	5	5%
15-18	4	2%	13	2%	1	1%
unanswered	11	5%	43	20%	78	75%

Table 6. Caregivers' Educational Background in Songinokhailkhan District

	Male (n=270)		Female (n=548)		unanswered (n=74)	
		%		%		%
Education (years in school)						
0	3	1%	2	0%	0	0%
1-4 (primary drop-out)	12	4%	16	3%	1	1%
5 (primary)	5	2%	2	0%	0	0%
6-8 (lower secondary)	76	28%	105	19%	4	5%
9-10 (upper secondary)	111	41%	280	51%	11	15%
11-14 (higher)	35	13%	102	19%	2	3%
15-18	1	0%	12	2%	0	0%
unanswered	21	8%	29	5%	56	76%

Analysis 2 looked at seven independent variables related to caregivers' home-based support and their parenting style: talk about what child does at school, talk about how education is useful in the child's future, teach school subjects to child, talk about the child's future dream, too busy to stay at home, understand the child's likes and dislikes, and bothered with child rearing. The result shows that both 2nd and 5th graders, whose caregivers talk about how education is useful in their child's future, have fewer difficulties in studying at primary schools (significant trend: $p < .10$). In contrast, 2nd graders, whose caregivers are too busy to stay at home and 2nd and 5th graders, whose caregivers are bothered with child rearing, have more difficulties in studying at primary schools (statistically significant: $p < .05$).

Conclusion

This study examined the relation between parental home-based support and children's school performance in urban Mongolia. Based on the semi-structured interviews with school principals and primary school managers and a questionnaire survey given to

caregivers, many issues regarding quality education were found, including rapid population growth, lack of classrooms and textbooks, few opportunities for after-class activities, weak social networks between parents, increasing numbers of alcoholic parents, and caregiver's high unemployment rate. In addition, the caregivers reported that 47% of the 2nd graders and 52% of the 5th graders have difficulties in studying at school. One of the key countermeasures designed to support students with learning difficulties could be parental support. The survey suggested that caregivers have positive influences and negative influences on learning. Positive influences are the caregiver's spouses' educational background, the caregivers' support for home-based ECE, and the caregivers talk about the importance of education. On the other hand, negative influences are that caregivers spend little time with the child at home and that they are bothered with child rearing.

For future research, findings on how to promote caregivers to support home-based ECE and how to encourage them to talk about future education at home would contribute to children's better performance at primary school. Moreover, comparative studies for rural and urban settings would contribute to a better understanding of the impact of home-based support on children's education in Mongolia.

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