Parent Expectations of Young Children in Taiwan

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Abstract

This study investigated how 223 mothers and 200 fathers of 3- to 6-year-old children from Taiwan saw their child-rearing strengths and shortcomings. The Mandarin version of the Parent as a Teacher Inventory (PAAT) was administered to each of the 423 subjects. This instrument is designed to examine five aspects of interaction between parent and child. Multivariate analyses of variance were applied to determine the significant effects of eight independent variables on the five PAAT subscales. The variables that significantly affected parent responses were (1) amount of time spent with a child, (2) household income, (3) parent education, and (4) gender of parent. The variable with the most impact was time spent with a child. Parents who spent 10 hours or more per week interacting with their child demonstrated greater strengths than peers who spent less time interacting with their child, as indicated on all subscales of the PAAT.

Introduction

Cultural and Lifestyle Change

Many people believe that the success of society depends on how well parents perform their role (Hsu & Hsu, 1999). Mothers and fathers from Taiwan agree that raising children presents a more complicated set of challenges for them than were encountered by parents in the past (Reid, 1999). This conclusion reflects enormous cultural changes that the island nation has experienced in recent years. When martial law ended in 1987, restrictions on newspapers were lifted, foreign travel became legal, import tariffs were cut, and goods that had previously been unavailable flowed into the country. Within one decade, per capita income doubled (Chien, 2003). Much of the new wealth can be attributed to increased employment opportunities for women. In a single generation, the average family declined from six children to the current norm of two children. These children are expected to complete high school and contribute to a rapidly developing technological society that has already achieved a literacy rate of over 90% (Cheng, 2001).

Taiwanese parents usually have lengthy work schedules and cannot spend a lot of time with their children, so they try to compensate by spending money on them. This arrangement has given rise to a new type of childhood experience favoring Western-made clothing, fast food, modern music, Internet communication, and learning English or Japanese to gain a career advantage. Students exposed to these influences differ considerably from older relatives in their outlook about the future. They are inclined to believe that contemporary methods of doing things should replace long-standing customs that have served as the mechanism for imposing a uniform lifestyle on everyone (Buki, Ma, Strom, & Strom, 2003; Yang, 2001).

Similarly, parents express appreciation for the values of privacy and independence that they have adopted from the Western world. They want their children well prepared for participation in the global competitive environment. To attain this goal, a growing number of parents have concluded that they should not perpetuate the tradition of extended family living in which elders are dominant figures. Instead, the trend is to establish a nuclear family because this type of family structure allows parents and their children to depart from old-fashioned ideas and patterns of behavior with less alienation of elders. Parents have great respect for aging relatives and typically provide them financial assistance, but they want to follow their own path to the future (Strom, Strom, Wang, Shen, Griswold, Chan, & Yang, 1998).

From 1997 through 2002, the government enacted a series of education reforms intended to help families facing unprecedented demands. For example, access to early childhood education-kindergarten-is now mandated. Legislation has put parents on notice that the nation expects them to be actively involved in teaching values and ethics to their children. Schools are required to offer education for parents as their children proceed from kindergarten through senior high school. The training of teachers is also being transformed to ensure that educators are willing to and understand how to collaborate with parents. Finally, the curriculum at every level from early childhood education through university is being revised to assign the highest priority to creative thinking. The decision to emphasize creative thinking and team problem solving represents a bold and comprehensive approach to education (Hwang, 2000; Republic of China Ministry of Education, 2001; Strom & Strom, 2002; Sun-Lu, 2004).

Purposes of the Study

Until recently, educators in Taiwan were not required to interact with parents. Previously, the assumption was that trained teachers were the only persons capable of helping students; therefore, parents were expected to avoid interfering and to leave instruction to professionals. In contrast, today, early childhood educators have the task of convincing parents to see themselves in a new context-as their children's first teachers who should arrange preschool learning at home to prepare children for the classroom. Some related tasks for educators include determining the level of parent knowledge about early development, finding out what they expect of young children, and learning how their influence is affected by demographic factors. The expectation is that if educators can become aware of the normative attitudes of Taiwanese parents, they will be better able to establish partnerships with them. Toward these possibilities, research teams from the United States and Taiwan collaborated in a survey of parent expectations.

Method

Subjects and Recruitment

The 423 parent participants in this study were intact couples with children in kindergarten and preschool (see Table 1). Each of the fathers (n = 200) and mothers (n = 223) provided responses about his or her expectations of children. Parents were 27 to 35 years old (32%), 36 to 39 years old (34%), or 40 to 57 years old (33%). Most were employed full time (78%) and

were well educated, with 37% possessing college degrees and 27% having attended graduate school.

Table 1

Frequencies and Percentages of Taiwanese Parents Representing Each Demographic Category

Identification Variables	Parents (*n* = 423)	
	Frequency	Percent
Parent Gender		
Father	200	47.3
Mother	223	52.7
Child Gender		
Boy	222	52.5
Girl	201	47.5
Child Age		
3-4 years	129	30.5
5 years	143	33.8
6 years	151	35.7
Parent Age		
27-35 years	137	32.4
36-39 years	145	34.3
40-57 years	141	33.3
Time Spent Together		
5 hours or fewer	101	23.9
5-10 hours	91	21.5
10 hours or more	231	54.6
Employment Status		
Working part-time, unemployed, or housewife	92	21.7
Working full-time	331	78.3
Household Income in NT$		
720,000 or less	50	11.8
720,000-1,300,000	202	47.8
1,300,000 or above	171	40.4
Parent Education		
Elementary/Senior high	56	13.2
Junior college/Some college	98	23.2
College diploma	156	36.9
Graduate school	113	26.7

Participants reported about their relationship with sons (*n* = 222) or daughters (*n* = 201). The ages of the children were 3 to 4 years (31%), 5 years (34%), and 6 years (36%). Over half (55%) of the parents stated that they spent more than 10 hours a week interacting with their child and doing things together. Another 22% spent 5-10 hours per week with their child, while 24% were with their child fewer than 5 hours a week.

Faculty members from a teacher training university in urban Taipei were responsible for

collecting data from parents whose children attended kindergarten and preschool classes at the laboratory school on campus. Parents were provided a package distributed by the teacher and brought home by their child. This package included a letter of explanation about the study, informed consent forms, and two copies of the Parent as a Teacher (PAAT) inventory. The letter stated that the purpose of the survey was to identify how Taiwanese parents saw themselves in terms of child-rearing capabilities and information needs as their child's teacher in the home. Responses would be used to help educators develop a suitable curriculum for parents that could enhance the partnership between families and schools. Mothers and fathers were asked to complete their individual inventory separately without consulting one another. They were also informed that the names of participants would be kept confidential and excluded from reports about the study. Of 540 parents contacted, 423 (78%) completed the survey.

Instrumentation

The purpose of the PAAT inventory is to identify favorable qualities of parents with 3- to 9-year-old children and detect behaviors for which further education appears warranted (Strom, 1995). The PAAT identifies how parents interact with their child, what they desire or expect of the child, what actions are taken in response to child behaviors, and their understanding of how to facilitate child development. The inventory includes 50 Likert-type items that constitute five subscales that contain 10 items each. The subscales representing key child development and parenting concepts from the research literature include the following:

1. *Creativity*: parental acceptance of the child's creativity and willingness to encourage its development.
2. *Frustration*: parental frustration with the child and focus of the frustration.
3. *Control*: parental feelings about the need to control the child's behavior.
4. *Play*: parental understanding of play and its influence on child development.
5. *Teaching/Learning*: parental views about child development and parents' ability to provide a supportive home environment.

PAAT instructions inform respondents that they will read statements on feelings about their child. For each statement, they are to circle only one answer. Each item includes four possible answers: (1) strong yes, (2) yes, (3) no, and (4) strong no. If parents have no doubt about a statement, they are directed to circle strong yes or strong no. Otherwise, yes or no should be circled, indicating the direction of their feelings concerning each of the 50 statements. There is no time limit.

Scoring the inventory involves assigning a numeric value of 4, 3, 2, or 1 to each of the 50 responses. The most desirable responses based upon child development research are valued 4, with diminishing values assigned to other responses on the basis of their distance from the most desirable. Scoring may begin from the left or the right. For example, the most desirable answer for item 29 is strong yes, while the most desirable response in item 39 is strong no. Both responses would be valued 4. Respondents who circled other answers would receive the lower values as shown below.

	Strong Yes	**Yes**	**No**	**Strong No**
29. My child learns new words when we play.	4	3	2	1
39. It is difficult for me to stay interested when playing with my child.	1	2	3	4

After values have been assigned to each answer, subtotals are derived for Creativity, Frustration, Control, Play, and the Teaching/Learning process. Scores of 2.5, the absolute mean, are used to differentiate performance that is considered favorable and unfavorable. When a

group mean of 2.5 or greater is shown for an item or subscale, it is regarded as favorable. More specifically, scores of 2.5 to 2.99 are slightly favorable, and scores of 3.0 to 4.0 are highly favorable. Conversely, mean scores below 2.5 are unfavorable, scores of 2.0 to 2.49 are slightly unfavorable, and scores of 1.0 to 1.99 are highly unfavorable.

Parents are mostly interested in getting feedback on their own behavior. This goal is attained by preparing an individual profile that includes all 50 inventory items restated in a positive format. Parents examine their profile to determine the ratings based on their own responses.

Reliability and Validity

Extensive reliability and validity studies using a broad range of language, socioeconomic, and cultural samples have determined that the PAAT is a valid instrument for assessing fundamental aspects of parenting (Strom, Fisharah, Strom, Wurster, El-Samadony, & El Khatib, 1991; Strom, Johnson, Strom, & Strom, 1990; Strom, Barros, & Strom, 1990; Strom, 1995). The overall alpha coefficient for this study was .80.

Before the PAAT could be provided to parents, it was necessary to translate the instrument into Mandarin. This task involved collaboration by three developmental psychologists who were fluent in Mandarin and English. In addition, five monolingual Mandarin speakers were assigned a checker role. First, the inventory was translated from English into Mandarin and then transcribed back to the source language as a check for consistency. Next, original and back translation versions were compared to ensure accuracy of content. Finally, idiomatic changes were made to ensure comprehension by Taiwanese readers. The Taiwanese research team considered all 50 items of the PAAT to be suitable for their culture. Consequently, no items were deleted or modified in the Mandarin translation that was administered to fathers and mothers.

Data Analysis

Various descriptive analyses were conducted to identify item frequencies, percentages, item mean scores, and standard deviations. Inferential analyses consisted of mean score comparisons between subjects within groups. The independent variables included parent gender, child gender, child age, parent age, time spent together, employment status, family income, and parent education level. The dependent variables included the five PAAT subscales. Analyses of variance (ANOVAs) for each subscale were conducted to ascertain the effect of each independent variable on each subscale. Pair-wise comparisons of items further clarified significant differences on the subscales.

Results

ANOVAs for each dependent variable were conducted to determine the effects of parent gender (father and mother). Only the play scale demonstrated significant differences between mothers (M = 3.01) and fathers (M = 2.94); F (1, 421) = 6.44, p < .01.

No significant differences were found for the independent variables of child gender, child age, parent age, and parental employment status with respect to the dependent variables-Creativity, Frustration, Control, Play, and Teaching/Learning (see Table 2).

Table 2
Analysis of Variance and Independent Variables for Taiwanese Parents of Young Children

		Univariate *F*				
Variation Source	**Multivariate *F***	**Creativity**	**Frustration**	**Control**	**Play**	**Teaching/ Learning**

Parent Gender	3.31	1.33	1.15	2.66	6.44*	0.14
Child Gender	0.48	1.58	1.25	1.08	0.15	0.10
Child Age	0.36	0.83	0.30	0.74	0.16	0.36
Parent Age	0.71	0.24	1.04	0.81	2.02	0.71
Time Together	26.14***	4.55*	8.27***	13.03***	35.69***	15.95***
Employment Status	0.19	0.38	0.54	0.12	1.55	1.33
Household Income	4.37**	4.85**	0.85	2.95	2.86	2.68
Parent Education	7.54***	13.26***	2.44	3.05*	1.58	5.72***

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$

Time Spent Together

A one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to determine the effects of the three levels of time spent together (5 hours or fewer, 5-10 hours, 10 hours or more) on the five dependent variables (PAAT scales). With the use of Wilks' criterion, the combined dependent variables were significantly affected by the time spent together variable, F (10, 832) = 7.73, $p < .001$.

ANOVAs on each dependent variable were conducted as follow-up tests to the MANOVA. ANOVAs for each of the five scales were found significant: Creativity, F (2, 420) = 4.55, $p < .001$; Frustration, F (2, 420) = 8.27, $p < .001$; Control, F (2, 420) = 13.03, $p < .001$; Play, F (2, 420) = 35.69, $p < .001$; and Teaching/Learning, F (2, 420) = 15.95, $p < .001$ (see Table 3).

Table 3
Mean, Standard Deviation, and ANOVA Statistics of Taiwanese Parents on Time Spent Together for the PAAT Scales

	Time Spent Together							
	5 Hours or Fewer (*n* = 101)		**5-10 Hours (*n* = 91)**		**10 Hours or More (*n* = 231)**			
Scale	***M***	***SD***	***M***	***SD***	***M***	***SD***	***F (2, 420)***	***p***
Creativity	2.78	.21	2.77	.19	2.83	.22	4.55	.011*
Frustration	2.65	.23	2.64	.31	2.76	.29	8.27	.000***
Control	2.82	.26	2.85	.29	2.97	.30	13.03	.000***
Play	2.84	.24	2.90	.25	3.07	.25	35.69	.000***
Teaching/ Learning	2.82	.24	2.91	.32	3.01	.29	15.95	.000***
Overall	2.78	.17	2.81	.20	2.92	.19	26.14	.000***

* Significant at .05 level.
*** Significant at .001 level.

ANOVA on time spent together for overall score was conducted to determine their relationship. This analysis was not considered a follow-up test of MANOVA. The results indicated that the overall score was affected by the time variable, F (2, 420) = 26.14, $p < .001$. To further understand the relationship between groups, pair-wise comparisons of group mean differences for the time spent together variable were conducted using Tukey's equal variances assumed procedure.

Parents who reported spending 10 hours or more with their children (M = 2.83, SD = .21) had significantly (p < .05) higher mean scores on the Creativity scale than the 5-10 hour group of parents (M = 2.77, SD = .19).

Parents who reported spending 10 hours or more with their children reported significantly higher (p < .01) mean scores (M = 2.76, SD = .29) on the Frustration scale than either of the other two groups, 5 hours or fewer (M = 2.65, SD = .23) and 5-10 hours (M = 2.64, SD = .31).

Similarly, on the control scale, parents who reported spending 10 hours or more with their children reported significantly higher (p < .001) mean scores (M = 2.97, SD = .30) than the 5 hours or fewer group (M = 2.82, SD= .26) and significantly higher (p < .01) than the 5-10 hour group (M = 2.85, SD = .29).

Parents who reported spending 10 hours or more with their children again reported significantly higher (p < .001) mean scores (M = 3.07, SD = .25) than either of the other two groups, 5 hours or fewer (M = 2.84, SD = .24) and 5-10 hours (M = 2.90, SD = .25) on the Play scale.

Lastly, on the Teaching/Learning scale, the pattern of parents who reported spending 10 hours or more with their children had significantly higher (p < .001) mean scores (M = 3.01, SD = .29) than either of the other two groups, 5 hours or fewer (M = 2.82, SD = .24) and 5-10 hours (M = 2.91, SD = .32).

Household Income

Household income was not a significant variable using MANOVA, F (10, 832) = 1.58, p = .112. However, when ANOVAs for each scale and overall score were conducted, only the Creativity scale was significant F (2, 420) = 4.85, p < .01. To further understand the relationships among the three income groups (NT$ 720,000 or less, NT$ 720,000–1,300,000, and NT$ 1,300,000 or more; the currency conversion rate was NT$ 33 = US$ 1), pair-wise comparisons of group mean differences for household income were conducted using Tukey's equal variances assumed procedure. On the Creativity scale, the lowest household income group scored themselves (M = 2.72, SD = .22) less favorably than the 720,000-1,300,000 (M = 2.81, SD = .22; p < .05) and the 1,300,000 or more group (M = 2.83, SD = .20; p < .01).

Parent Education

MANOVA revealed the significant effect of parent education (elementary to senior high, junior college/some college, college diploma, or graduate school) on the five dependent variables, F (15, 115) = 3.30, p < .001. ANOVAs on each dependent variable were conducted as follow-up tests. Parent education significantly affected parent responses on Creativity, F (3, 419) = 13.26, p < .001; Control, F (3, 419) = 3.05, p < .05; and Teaching/Learning, F (3, 419) = 5.72, p < .001. Specifically, these scale differences were examined using pair-wise comparisons of group mean differences. In each case, parents with more education scored themselves significantly higher than those with less education.

Discussion

Creativity

Time together, household income, and parent education significantly influenced the dependent variable Creativity. Taiwanese parents with young children look forward, with some anxiety, to providing the best education possible for their child. They understand the importance that will be placed on grades and test scores as the child progresses toward college. Consequently, they tend to focus even during these early years of schooling more on the outcome-based effects of academics than on the possible positive effects of creativity for their young child's future. When

the academic emphasis is exclusive, creative behavior is discouraged.

Additionally, the traditional Taiwanese view that elders should act as role models can sometimes conflict with encouraging creativity of children expressed in make-believe play. Parents represent an unchallengeable authority. Because culture is deep-rooted, efforts are made to preserve hierarchical status within families. Accordingly, Taiwanese parents want to maintain their role as trusted advisors and may find it difficult to reconcile this goal with participation in imaginative activities that could undermine their position of dominance.

However, current trends in the global workforce signal a need for creativity in young professionals. Employers are increasingly looking for individuals who can create new ideas and work well in collaborative teams. Formal education is still valued, but the creative component increases an employee's importance and marketability. Since 2001, Taiwan has been undergoing a process of assigning high priority to creativity in elementary and secondary education (Republic of China Ministry of Education, 2001; Strom & Strom, 2002). This change may indicate that Taiwanese society is becoming aware of the necessity to foster creativity in the developing child.

Time Together

One of the most pervasive variables in this study, and related studies of parenting strengths and needs, is the amount of time parents spend interacting with their child. Parents who spent 10 hours or more scored significantly higher than the other parents on the overall score, Creativity, Frustration, Control, Play, and Teaching/Learning scales. These findings suggest that parents should be encouraged to recognize this single factor as an area of focus in their relationship with their child. Most tasks involved in aiding the child's development take time. Parents who invest greater time talking to and doing things with their child perceive themselves as more successful.

These findings contradict the familiar assertion that lesser amounts of "quality time" are equivalent to spending greater quantities of time together. Instead, it seems that an effective way for parents to become better informed about what is happening in the life of their children is to spend time together.

Establishing a causal link between spending more time with a child and parenting success is beyond the scope of this type of research design. However, educators can utilize the responses of these parents to help design a curriculum that could be beneficial to families. The variable of time spent together offers considerable promise as a manipulable factor for parent intervention programs because it implies a decision-making process-parents can choose to spend more time with their children. This parenting change does not require additional schooling or higher income.

Conclusion

Limitations of this study and some caveats should be discussed. First, it is unknown whether the findings of this study would generalize to other groups of parents from Taiwan or abroad. Second, the PAAT is not intended to be exhaustive. Other aspects of parenting could account for variance in success. Lastly, this descriptive design is not intended to imply causality. Future educational interventions would be necessary to help determine causal relationships between variables.

In conclusion, Taiwanese parents of young children obtained slightly favorable ratings for child-rearing practices on all subscales and overall performance for the PAAT. The highest rating was for the Play subscale and the lowest rating was for the Frustration subscale. The kindergarten faculty plans to begin its parent education curriculum by targeting 13 items on which group scores of parents received slightly unfavorable or highly unfavorable ratings. Special emphasis will be devoted to several items on the creativity subscale that registered the largest number of unfavorable responses. The parent curriculum will also reinforce attitudes and procedures for

which performance of the parents is already commendable.

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