MEDIA & COMMUNICATION STUDIES | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Parental mediation: Its impact on contexts of emotional behavioral adjustment among children in Kota Kinabalu district

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Abstract: The current study aimed to examine the impact of parental mediation on the contexts of emotional behavioral adjustment among 9-to-11-year-old children in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. A random sampling of 175 parents was recruited to participate in the study using the Google forms online questionnaire. Multiple regression analysis indicated the significance in monitoring influence on the context of conduct problems, $F(1, 173) = 4.666$; hyperactivity, $F(1, 173) = 13.203$; prosocial behavior, $F(2, 172) = 13.542; p < .05$, with respect to the subscales of Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ). While active co-use influences on the peer problem $F(1, 173) = 7.496$; and prosocial behavior $F(2, 172) = 13.542, p < .05$. Interaction and technical restriction, however, did not show any significant influence. Findings thus suggested that monitoring and active co-use have a positive effect on the prosocial behavior while diminishing the other subscales of SDQ.

Subjects: Mass Communication; Technical Communication; Family Communication; Information Technology;

Keywords: Kota Kinabalu parents; parental mediation; emotional-behavioral adjustment

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

I completed my Bachelor of Psychology with Honours (Child and family psychology) in Universiti Malaysia Sabah, Malaysia. I have been studying the child and family psychology course for three years as an undergraduate. Now, I am currently pursuing a Master in Research in Universiti Malaysia Sabah. I hope that with this paper, it can create awareness among parents about the importance of parental mediation strategies with their children in the context of Malaysia.

PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

In the media-induced world, children are used to the presence of gadgets in their upbringing environment. Younger children may not be aware of the risk of being obsessive with media usage. With that in mind, parents have the role of guiding and monitoring their children's usage of media. This is referred to as parental mediation. During the pre-adolescence period, children are sensitive to changes and tend to show more authority with their decisions. They may have conflicts with their parents' decisions regarding the media rules. Parents should take this into account so that the guideline is age-appropriate. Parental mediation strategies can impact on children's emotional and social aspects just as media can influence children's wellbeing. The findings showed monitoring and active co-use can have a significant association. However, the study is limited to the quantitative approach and it is recommended to include more in-depth insight.
1. Introduction
The presence of sophisticated gadgets, entrancing mobile applications, and Internet access have grown into a child’s surroundings (Holloway et al., 2013). It encourages the upward trend of media consumers, Internet users, and gadget owners among the younger generation (Rideout et al., 2010). Just as the growing popularity of mobile phones rises, media applications are popular with young children for entertainment/recreational, educational, and social purposes.

Frequent gadget use and screen time can deprive the children's interest of socializing and getting involved with their environment (e.g., Suhana, 2017; Ummah, 2018), impacting in their emotional and behavioral changes (Maryam et al., 2016). With the exposure of mobile gadgets in their children's lives, parents need to adjust themselves such as supervise, guide, and execute plans to manage their children's Internet and smartphone use (Hsieh et al., 2019). Such strategies used by parents on children regarding media use management are generally known as “parental mediation” (Shin & Huh, 2011). The importance of the parental role in children's media practices can determine their children's media-induced socio-emotional development (Nikken & Schols, 2015). Parental mediation can create different social environments for their children when they use their gadgets, helping them in the process of socialization.

Concerning parental mediation impact on children's and adolescents’ socio-emotional adjustment, there are only a few research conducted (e.g., Gentile et al., 2014; Hsueh & Chng, 2016; Van Petegem et al., 2019). In terms of child adjustment, Van Petegem et al. (2019) did not explore in detail such that the emotional and social outcomes can be seen clearly. Active and restrictive parental mediation both is significant positive predictors of self-regulatory competencies and impulsivity of youths (Hsueh & Chng, 2016). Parental monitoring, though, has a significant effect on children's social outcomes in terms of prosocial and aggressive behavior (Gentile et al., 2014). However, the study still lacks the inclusion of different types of parental mediation in the context of a child’s emotional-behavioral adjustment. In the Malaysian context, the research related to such matter is still not abundant.

Such a trend is correspondingly distressing in Malaysia. The digital and technological era brings forth the increasing national broadband penetration rate of Internet and mobile devices across the households. With parents integrating mobile devices into their lives, it prompts the exposure of these devices among children. According to MCMC (2018), the survey found that the nine of ten children in the age range from 5 to 17 years old were using the Internet. It was noted that Sabah was the third highest percentage distribution of Internet users by the state of residence (9.7%) (MCMC, 2017).

It becomes more tiring and challenging for parents to deal with older children (Vaala & Hornik, 2014). Children of 9–11 years old are caught up in tension with their parents regarding internet or gadget use. They are typically given increased freedom and authority to make decisions (Gentile et al., 2014). With the broadening of their environmental influences, they become increasingly active to be involved in diverse social interactions. Media-related influence by peers may conflict with parental guidance of appropriate use of media among children. Thus, this creates a challenge for parents’ efforts to strategize the ways to mediate their children’s media use as well as benefit the children’s emotional and behavioral adjustment. The present study takes the opportunity to examine the significant influence of parental mediation (active co-use, interaction restriction, technical restriction, and monitoring) on emotional-behavioral adjustment among children aged 9–11 years old. Research questions are formulated as follows:

RQ 1: Does active co-use significantly influence the contexts of emotional behavioral adjustment among children?

RQ 2: Does interaction restriction significantly influence the contexts of emotional behavioral adjustment among children?
RQ 3: Does technical restriction significantly influence the contexts of emotional behavioral adjustment among children?

RQ 4: Does monitoring significantly influence the contexts of emotional behavioral adjustment among children?

2. Methods

2.1. Research design
The design of the research was in the form of quantitative research, whereby Google form questionnaires were used.

2.2. Research population and sample
In the study, the population consists of the parents with primary school children aged from 9 to 11 years old in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. The population is 40,620 as per the data in 2018 from the Department of Statistics Sabah at Kompleks Pentadbiran Kerajaan Persekutuan Sabah. Within the population, the sampling method used in the study is random sampling via Excel. G*Power3.1 (Faul et al., 2009) is used to calculate the sample size, with medium effect size ($f^2 = .15$) (Cohen, 1988). A total of 178 respondents was required to achieve a power of .95. In the present study, 175 parents are involved as respondents.

2.3. Research location
This research location takes place in the areas within the Kota Kinabalu district, where the research will be implemented. The target places are mainly primary schools.

2.4. Research instrument
In the present study, the data is gathered through the distribution of Google form questionnaires to the representative sample with trilingual (English, Malay, and Chinese) translation. Each set of questionnaire comprises three parts: demographic information, Livingstone and Helsper (2008) Parental Mediation as well as Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) (Goodman, 1994).

Demographic information comprises items related to gender, age, religion, education level, the monthly income level of the family, employment status, and marital status. Livingstone and Helsper (2008) Parental Mediation includes 4 subscales: active co-use (9 items), interaction restriction (4 items), technical restriction (7 items), and monitoring (4 items). SDQ includes 25 items equally divided among the subscales which are emotional problems, conduct problems, hyperactivity, peer problems, and prosocial behaviors (Goodman, 1994; Hosokawa & Katsuma, 2015).

2.5. Data analysis
The data were analyzed by using the Package for Social Science (SPSS) Statistics 26 (multiple regression analysis) to test the association.

3. Results

3.1. Multiple regression analysis for the subscales of Livingstone and Helsper (2008) parental mediation (LHPM) on strengths and difficulties questionnaire (SDQ)
Table 1 indicates the results of the multiple regression analysis for the independent variables (subscales of LHPM) and dependent variables (subscales of SDQ).
Based on the outcome shown in Table 1, it shows that the monitoring subscale of LHPM explained 2.6% of the variation in the conduct problems, $F(1, 173) = 4.666; 7.1\%$ of the variation in the hyperactivity, $F(1, 173) = 13.203; 13.6\%$ of the variation in the prosocial behavior, $F(2, 172) = 13.542; p < .05$, with respect to the subscales of SDQ. The monitoring subscale was found to be a strong and significant predictor to conduct problems, hyperactivity, and prosocial behavior subscale of SDQ.

| Predictors                  | $\beta$ | $t$   | $p$     | $R^2$ | $F$     |
|-----------------------------|---------|-------|---------|-------|---------|
| Outcome: Emotional problems |         |       |         | .022  | .957    |
| Active co-use               | -.102   | -.944 | .347    |       |         |
| Interaction restriction     | .020    | .166  | .868    |       |         |
| Technical restriction       | -.019   | -.188 | .851    |       |         |
| Monitoring                  | -.073   | -.644 | .521    |       |         |
| Outcome: Conduct problems   |         |       |         |       |         |
| Active co-use               | -.009   | -.102 | .919    |       |         |
| Interaction restriction     | .092    | .951  | .343    |       |         |
| Technical restriction       | .063    | .652  | .515    |       |         |
| Monitoring                  | -.162   | -2.160| .032    | .026  | 4.666   |
| Outcome: Hyperactivity      |         |       |         |       |         |
| Active co-use               | -.076   | -.902 | .368    |       |         |
| Interaction restriction     | -.022   | -.232 | .817    |       |         |
| Technical restriction       | -.022   | -.229 | .819    |       |         |
| Monitoring                  | -.266   | -3.634| .000    | .071  | 13.203  |
| Outcome: Peer problems      |         |       |         |       |         |
| Active co-use               | -.204   | -2.738| .007    | .042  | 7.496   |
| Interaction restriction     | -.006   | -.058 | .954    |       |         |
| Technical restriction       | -.074   | -.904 | .367    |       |         |
| Monitoring                  | -.120   | -1.401| .163    |       |         |
| Outcome: Prosocial behavior |         |       |         |       |         |
| Active co-use               | .211    | 2.584 | .011    | .136  | 13.542  |
| Interaction restriction     | -.140   | -1.244| .215    |       |         |
| Technical restriction       | .000    | .002  | .999    |       |         |
| Monitoring                  | .215    | 2.630 | .009    | .136  | 13.542  |

$\beta =$ Standard beta coefficient, $t =$ t-test statistics, $p =$ significant level.
Table 2. Results of research question testing

| Research questions | Level of sig. | Outcome |
|--------------------|--------------|---------|
| RQ 1: Does active co-use significantly influence the contexts of emotional behavioral adjustment among children? | Significant | Supported in the context of peer problems & prosocial |
| RQ 2: Does interaction restriction significantly influence the contexts of emotional behavioral adjustment among children? | Not significant | Not supported |
| RQ 3: Does technical restriction significantly influence the contexts of emotional behavioral adjustment among children? | Not significant | Not supported |
| RQ 4: Does monitoring significantly influence the contexts of emotional behavioral adjustment among children? | Significant | Supported in the context of conduct problems, peer problems, & hyperactivity |

Active co-use subscale was noted to explain 4.2% of the variation in the peer problems, $F(1, 173) = 7.496$; as well as, similar to monitoring, 13.6% of the variation in the prosocial behavior subscale of SDQ; $F(2, 172) = 13.542$, $p < .05$. This signifies active co-use as a significant predictor of the peer problem and prosocial behavior subscales of SDQ. It is noted that interaction restriction and technical restriction subscales of LHPM do not significantly influence on any subscale of SDQ. In addition, there is no significant influence of any LHPM subscale on the emotional problems subscale of SDQ. The research question testing results are summarized in Table 2.

4. Discussion

Parental mediation in terms of monitoring has a significant impact on conduct problems, hyperactivity, and prosocial behavior among 9-to-11-year-old children. Monitoring includes the parents’ check up on children’s media activity (Livingstone & Helsper, 2008), such as the time taken of spending on gadgets and their online activity contents. In East and West Malaysia, parent practice collectivist values and so, most of them tend to adopt authoritarian parenting as normative for rearing their children and to promote optimal development (Keshavarz & Baharudin, 2009). Prior to this matter, the role of culture has a similar influence on media-induced parenting as in parental mediation, even if it is in Kota Kinabalu, the capital city of Sabah (East Malaysia).

Monitoring, comparatively, is much adopted by parents and proves to impact significantly on the children’s adjustment contexts. Parents take on the responsibility of examining their children’s usage of media in terms of frequency and content. They can be more aware of their children’s media activity through close inspection while having control over children’s use of media without it being too restrictive. With that, the children are more likely to adjust themselves to use their gadgets under the parents’ monitoring. From the result, it was also noted that there was no significant influence of monitoring on the emotional problems and peer problem context. The children, despite being at a sensitive period of 9–11 years old, are still accustomed to the upbringing of prioritizing the values such as adherence to social conventions and in-group (e.g., family) interdependence. The nature of monitoring does not buffer the emotional relationship between parents and children. As for peer problems, such problem behavior is reciprocally associated with parental knowledge predicted by adolescent disclosure, rather than parental monitoring (Lippold et al., 2014).

From the study, the results indicated that active co-use significantly impacts the peer problems and prosocial behavior context of children’s adjustment. Under this mediation, parents spend quality time using media simultaneously with their children while communicating with their children about the negative impact and appropriate use of media (Livingstone & Helsper, 2008). Schoon and Melzer (2015) explained
that the form of active co-use (active-emotional co-use) increases family ties through inter-generational interactions, which then pose the possibility of being a protective or resilience factor reducing the probability of problematic child behavior when they face challenging social situations. This can be related to reducing the risk of peer problems and promoting prosocial behavior among children.

On the other hand, the interaction and technical restriction do not reflect a significant impact on any content of the children’s adjustment. It would be harder for parents to implement interaction restriction such that they ban their children’s social interaction apps, playing online games, and downloading items online to address problematic activities (Livingstone & Helsper, 2008). This may put a strain on the parent–child relationship as well as result in conflict with the advance and adaptability of technology. As for the technical restriction, it requires the parents to install the software as filtering and monitoring the children’s media activity (Daud et al., 2014). Not all parents are familiar or knowledgeable with the utility of such software on their children’s media. This, thus, may be the reason why these two strategies less likely to influence the children’s adjustment.

5. Conclusion
In summary, monitoring and active co-use are significant predictors of the contexts of children's emotional-behavioral adjustment with it being more consistent with the nature of parenting styles in Kota Kinabalu. Active co-use, similar to monitoring, also has a similar effect on prosocial behavior context. Monitoring is also a significant predictor in the context of conduct problems and hyperactivity while active co-use is significantly noted to be a predictor in the context of peer problems. The findings noted a few limitations and among them is based on the utility of self-reported questionnaires. This makes it vulnerable to biases and over- or under-estimation of the parents' view of their mediation styles on children. In addition, it is undeniable the presence of conceivable factors such as background factors influencing the instruments, especially parent-report of SDQ. Aside from the children's age set as a controlled variable, the other variables are not within control and may contribute as confounding factors on the findings. Despite those limitations, the research took the approach to examine different styles of parental mediation and in-depth aspects of emotional behavioral adjustment among children.

6. Impact of study
The study can contribute to the literature about the understanding of the association between parental mediation strategies and children's emotional-behavioral adjustment in the context of Malaysia (Sabah; Kota Kinabalu). It also provides awareness among Malaysian parents about the significance of parental mediation strategies (monitoring and active co-use) on reducing the risk of children’s conduct problems, hyperactivity/inattention, and peer problems as well as promoting prosocial behavior. Besides for the benefit of parents, teachers and media professionals may consider this part of knowledge to provide guidelines for children without conflicting with parents.

7. Future recommendation
For future studies, a qualitative approach is recommended to better understand and comprehend the context of parental mediation on children's emotional-behavioral adjustment. Qualitative data capture allows researchers to be far more speculative and insights about the area of parental mediation and its effect on children's socioemotional aspect. The research can also include more ethnics and cultural aspects to be studied for better generalization of findings as this field of research is still inadequate.

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