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INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA  
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# PARENTS' PERCEPTION TOWARDS SELF-DETERMINATION IN PRE-SCHOOL CHILDREN

BY

VINA ADRIANY

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**PARENTS' PERCEPTION TOWARDS SELF-  
DETERMINATION IN PRE-SCHOOL CHILDREN**

**BY**

**VINA ADRIANY**

**A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER  
OF EDUCATION**

**KULLIYAH OF EDUCATION  
INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY  
MALAYSIA**

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# ABSTRACT

The study investigated parents' perception towards self-determination of their pre-school children. The researcher was interested in identifying whether there were any significant differences in parents' perception with regard to Parents' Gender, educational level, and income level.

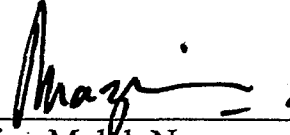
The sample of this study consists of 101 parents whose children's ages range from 3 to 6 years old. The parents who participated in the study were randomly selected from six pre-schools in district of Gombak. A self-constructed instrument was utilized for the purpose of the study. Some of the items in the instrument were modified and revised from The Perceptions of Parent Scale on Self-Determination and The Self-Determination Scale developed by Deci and Ryan from University of Rochester. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were employed to analyze the data collected.

The findings of this study revealed that there were no significant differences in parents' perception on self-determination with regards to parents' educational level, income level, and sex. However, when there was interaction effect between parents' educational level and income level, the result indicated there was a statistical significant difference in parents' perception. The study also showed that generally parents perceived self-determination as an important skill to be taught to their pre-school children. Finally, it is recommended that similar research using other variables and larger samples be conducted in the future.

تصدى هذا البحث بالدراسة لتصوّر الأولياء لاستقلالية أبنائهم في اتخاذ القرار في مرحلة رياض الأطفال. وقد خصّ بالتركيز مدى تأثير عوامل الجنس و المؤهلات التعليمية و مستوى الدخل المادي في آراء الأولياء. و شارك في هذه الدراسة الميدانية 101 من الأهالي الذين يتراوح أعمار أطفالهم بين الثالثة و السادسة تمّ اختيارهم عشوائيا من بين أولياء الأطفال المنتميين إلى 6 رياض أطفال في ضاحية جومباك. و قد توصلت الباحثة في تجميع المعطيات من المشاركين باستبيان صاغته خصيصًا لهذه الدراسة علما أنّ هذه الآلية قد تضمنت صيغا منقحة من بعض العناصر المقتبسة من مقياسي "تصوّر الأولياء للاستقلالية" و "استقلال القرار " اللذين وضعهما الباحثان ديسي وراين من جامعة روشستر. و توخّت الباحثة في تحليل المعطيات الإحصائية أسلوب الوصف و الاستدلال. و قد جاءت نتائج هذا البحث مفنّدة لأيّ تأثير منفصل سواء لجنس المشاركين أو مستواهم التعليمي أو المادي على آرائهم. إلا أنّ تفاعل هذه العوامل مع بعضها البعض (مثل تظافر عاملي التعليم و الدخل المالي) قد كان له تأثير واضح على مواقف الأولياء. و محصلة هذه الدراسة أنّ الأولياء عموماً يؤمنون بضرورة تنشئة أولادهم على الاستقلال في قراراتهم منذ الصغر. إلا أنّ الباحثة توصي بأجراء المزيد من الدراسات المماثلة مع المتغيرات المختلفة بزيادة عدد المشاركين في البحوث المستقبلية.

## APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion, it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Education.



Nor Azian Mohd. Noor

Supervisor

Date: 20/8/02

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion, it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Education.



Zaleha Izhah

Examiner

Date: 22/8/02

This thesis was submitted to the Kulliyyah of Education and is accepted as partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Education.



Mohamad Sahari Nordin

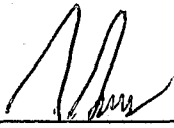
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# DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged by proper citations giving explicit references and a bibliography is appended.

Name: Vina Adriany

Signature:  \_\_\_\_\_

Date: 19/8/02

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*This thesis is dedicated to my self-determined son,  
Muhammad Iqbal Ikhwaanushshafa and my beloved husband,  
Kurniawan Saefullah for their constant love, patience, sacrifice, and  
support.*

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### **Background of the Study**

Most people make choices every day; for example, what food to eat, what clothes to wear, which school to go to and so on. Some choices have a more profound impact on the course of one's life than others, and typically these types of choices occur infrequently. For some people, especially children, there is little opportunity to practice making choices or experience their consequences. This can be problematic, as one usually gains experience from the opportunity to make day-to-day choices. When even daily choice-making opportunities are limited, as has been assumed to be the case for many pre-school children, the ability to make choices can be quite circumscribed.

Making choices is one aspect of the broader concept of self-determination, which refers to the attitudes, abilities, and skills that allow individuals to define personal goals, take initiative to reach those goals, consider options, and make choices. For young children, the foundations of self-determination begin within the context of the family. These include engagement, mastery motivation, development and awareness of preferences, choice-making, spontaneous communication, social competence, problem solving, assertiveness, self-regulation, and persistence. To support self-determination for families and their young children, professionals such as teachers or caregivers are required to build trustworthy relationships, guided by the dreams, interests, and values of each family.

Research from the social domain perspective and early philosophy of education also suggest that allowing children to make choices is important for development (Killen & Smetana, 1999). Today, however, most parents are unable to inculcate self-determination in their young children. They perceive their young children as being helpless. Therefore parents must provide choices for their children and do not employ parenting styles that will build self-determined children, perhaps because parents are not aware of the importance.

There are some indications that differences in parenting backgrounds are associated with differences in parenting style. Le Vine (cited in Barnes, 1995) identified parents from African and other non-Western cultures value obedience and pay less importance to children's independence and self-determination, while most of the parents in Western cultures encourage children's independence and self-regulation. In research conducted by Zevalkink (1997) in Indonesia, she compared the parenting styles in both urban and rural areas. Her study found significant differences in parenting styles between low-middle socio-economic status families and low socio-economic status families on variables such as economic wealth and family education level.

Therefore, it is worth conducting research in order to investigate parenting background in perceiving the development of self-determination in their pre-school children. Findings from this study will benefit not only educators who are involved with pre-school children, but also, most importantly, the findings can help parents to improve their parenting style.

## Statement of the Problem

This research will undertake a critical study of the relationship between parents' perception towards the self-determination of their pre-school children in Malaysia. In the past many parents tended to underestimate their young children's ability to make personal choices or decisions. They are unable to see their children as individuals who are capable of making decisions for themselves. Hence, almost all aspects of the children's lives will be decided by their parents. The decisions range from simple things such as picking out which clothes to wear, choosing what meal to eat, and determining which school to go to. As a result, these parents have created dependency behavior in their children.

In 1973, Baumrind (cited in Barnes, 1995) identified three parenting styles, which she labeled permissive, authoritarian, and authoritative. Permissive parents do not set standards for the child's behavior and do not believe in restricting the child's autonomy. They exercise less control over their children than is apparent with other styles, allow their children to determine their own schedules and activities, demand less achievement and tolerate more immature behavior than other parents.

Authoritarian (or autocratic) parents, on the other hand, value obedience and believe in limiting the child's autonomy and independence. They stress obedience to authority, have set standards of behavior, and favor punitive measures to control children's willful behavior. Such parents enforce rules firmly but do not encourage independence in their children.

Authoritative parents also set standards for their child's behavior and value compliance, but they also respect the child's autonomy and independence. They tend to believe in reciprocal rights for parents and children, explain rules and decisions, exert control by reasoning with children, and listen to the child's point of view and value assertion. The type of control exercised by these parents is demanding, in the sense that it makes demands on the child to behave in developmentally appropriate ways. Such parents encourage independence.

The relationship between these parenting styles and the behavior displayed by the children is summarized in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1

Parenting Style and Children's Behavior

Parenting Styles	Children's Behavior
<p><b>Permissive-indulgent parents</b></p> <p>Rules not enforced</p> <p>Rules not clearly communicated</p> <p>Yields to coercion, whining, nagging, crying by the child</p> <p>Inconsistent discipline:</p> <p>Few demands or expectations for independent behavior</p> <p>Ignores or accepts bad behavior</p> <p>Hides impatience, anger or annoyance</p> <p>Moderate warmth</p> <p>Glorification of importance of free expression of impulses and desires</p>	<p><b>Impulsive- aggressive behavior</b></p> <p>Resistive, noncompliance to adult</p> <p>Low in self-reliance</p> <p>Low in achievement orientation</p> <p>Lacking in self control</p> <p>Aggressive</p> <p>Quick to anger but fast to recover cheerful mood</p> <p>Impulsive</p> <p>Aimless, low in goal –directed activities</p> <p>Domineering</p>

Cont'd Table 1.1

<p><b>Authoritarian parent</b></p> <p>Rigid enforcement of rules</p> <p>Confronts and punishes bad behavior</p> <p>Shows anger and displeasure</p> <p>Rules not clearly explained</p> <p>Views child as dominated by uncontrolled or solicited forces</p> <p>Persistent in enforcement of rules in the face of opposition and coercion</p> <p>Harsh, punitive discipline</p> <p>Low in warmth and positive involvement</p> <p>No cultural events or mutual activities planned</p> <p>No educational demand or standard</p>	<p><b>Conflicted-irritable children</b></p> <p>Fearful, apprehensive</p> <p>Moody, unhappy</p> <p>Easily annoyed</p> <p>Passively hostile and guileful</p> <p>Vulnerable to stress</p> <p>Alternate between aggressive, unfriendly behavior and sulky withdrawal</p> <p>Aimless</p>
<p><b>Authoritative parent</b></p> <p>Firm enforcement of rules</p> <p>Does not yield to child coercion</p> <p>Confronts disobedience in child</p> <p>Shows displeasure and annoyance in response to child's bad behavior</p> <p>Shows pleasure and support of child's constructive behavior</p> <p>Rules clearly communicated</p> <p>Consider child's wishes and solicit child's opinion</p> <p>Alternative offered</p> <p>Warm, involved, responsive</p> <p>Expects mature, independent behavior appropriate for the child's age</p> <p>Cultural events and joint activities planned</p> <p>Educational standards set and enforced</p>	<p><b>Energetic-friendly child</b></p> <p>Self-reliant</p> <p>Self-controlled</p> <p>High energy level</p> <p>Cheerful</p> <p>Friendly relations with friends</p> <p>Copes well with stress</p> <p>Interest and curiosity in novel situation</p> <p>Co-operative with adult</p> <p>Tractable</p> <p>Purposive</p> <p>Achievement-oriented</p>

Source: Hetherington and Parke, 1993 (cited in Barnes, 1995), p. 85

Hetherington and Parke summarized Baumrind's research by indicating that children with authoritative parents showed greater social responsibility (as measured by friendliness towards peers and cooperativeness towards adults). They also tended to show more independent behavior. Baumrind suggested that authoritative parents balance high control with high responsiveness and that is a critical factor in determining the nature of children's behavior.

Surprisingly, permissive parents do not foster independence in children. Indeed, Baumrind found that permissiveness and over-protectiveness were associated with dependence in children.

The data in the Table also suggested that parenting styles that do not encourage children's independent behavior (i.e. permissive and authoritarian) are associated with children's negative behavioral outcomes. On the other hand, an authoritative parenting style fosters independent behavior in children and results in positive behavioral outcomes for children.

The relationship between parenting style and children's behavior is not limited to short-term outcomes. When Baumrind followed up some of her sample from the pre-school period to adolescence she found that parenting styles were related to children's social competence in the long term. In particular, parenting styles which did not encourage independent behavior had more negative long-term outcomes, especially for boys. On the other hand, the authoritative style was associated with positive outcomes in adolescence.

Mithaug (1991) believed that lack of self-determination in childhood has led children into three major problems when they become adolescents:

- (1) Decline: a situation when life has no purpose.
- (2) Entitlement: unbridled expectations.
- (3) Disillusionment: generation gap and reality gap.

These three major problems are reflected in twenty-five indicators. The twenty-five indicators that follow illustrate the range of problems adolescents face in American society. They are:

1. Today most youth are more interested in having fun than in becoming successful people.
2. Sixty-eight percent of all 4<sup>th</sup> graders, 64 percent of all 8<sup>th</sup> graders, and 43 percent of all 11<sup>th</sup> graders spend three or more hours watching television each day.
3. Eighty percent of all 4<sup>th</sup> graders, 61 percent of all 8<sup>th</sup> graders, and 59 percent of all 11<sup>th</sup> graders spend less than one hour on homework each day.
4. Eighty percent of high school seniors do not use their own money to plan for their future.
5. Cocaine use among American youth, already the highest in the industrialized world, has nearly doubled in the past decade.
6. From 1950 to 1985, sexually transmitted diseases have increased 218 percent for youth aged 15 to 24.
7. Births to unmarried women between ages of 15 and 19 have increased 251 percents from 1950 to 1985.

8. For youth 18 and younger, arrests for drunk driving and drug abuse have increased over 1200 percent from 1965 to 1985.
9. Voting by eligible 18 to 24 years old have decreased from 52 to 42 percent from 1972 to 1984.
10. From 1960 to 1985, suicides among youth between age 15 and 19 increased 194 percent for males and 47 percent for females.
11. From 1960 to 1980, homicides involving youth between ages 15 and 19 have increased 165 percent.
12. Public school expenditure per student has increased 168 percent from 1985 to 1987.
13. Pupil/ teacher ratio in public schools has decreased 34 percent from 1985 to 1987.
14. According to the U.S. Department of Education, the U.S. ranked second among 15 industrialized nations in instructional expenditures per pupil in 1985.
15. In international mathematics tests, U.S. 8<sup>th</sup> graders ranked 13<sup>th</sup> among students from 18 countries in 1982.
16. In science, U.S. elementary and high school students knew less in 1983 than their counterparts did in 1970.
17. In a 1986 survey of economic knowledge, only 34 percent of American high school students correctly defined profits and only 39 percent could define the Gross National Product.
18. In 1983, high school achievement scores were lower when the Soviet Union launched Sputniks I and II in 1957.