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Factors Related to Perception of Parental Efficacy

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ABSTRAK

Kajian ini menentukan perkaitan di antara faktor terpilih dalam konteks sosial keluarga (iaitu latarbelakang keluarga: pendidikan, pendapatan keluarga, dan bilangan anak; dan faktor keibubapaan: kualiti keibubapaan yang diterima semasa kanak-kanak, kepuasan hubungan keibubapaan, dan pengetahuan keibubapaan) dengan persepsi keberkesanan keibubapaan. Responden terdiri daripada 118 orang ibubapa yang mempunyai anak Darjah Lima daripada 2 buah sekolah di Subang Jaya, dan telah dipilih secara persampelan rawak berlapis. Data telah dikumpulkan dengan menggunakan soalselidik yang dijawab sendiri oleh responden. Persepsi keberkesanan keibubapaan telah diukur menggunakan skala 'Perception of Parental Efficacy' (Luster 1985). Kualiti keibubapaan yang diterima semasa zaman kanak-kanak telah diukur menggunakan skala 'Supportive Parenting' (Simon *et al.* 1992) yang telah dimodifikasi. Kepuasan hubungan keibubapaan telah diukur menggunakan 5 item yang telah diadaptasi daripada skala 'Relationship Satisfaction' (Simons *et al.* 1993) dan 'Parent-child Rational Quality' (Umberson 1989). Pengetahuan keibubapaan telah diukur menggunakan 5 item yang telah diadaptasi daripada skala 'Parental Influence' (Simon *et al.* 1993) dan 'Parenting Knowledge' (Rozumah 1995). Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa diperingkat bivariat, pendapatan keluarga, kepuasan hubungan keibubapaan, dan pengetahuan keibubapaan mempunyai perkaitan signifikan dengan persepsi keberkesanan keibubapaan. Apabila kesemua variabel konteks sosial keluarga dikawal secara statistik, hanya pengetahuan keibubapaan sahaja menyumbang secara signifikan kepada persepsi keberkesanan keibubapaan. Kajian ini menyimpulkan bahawa beberapa faktor dalam konteks sosial keluarga boleh mempengaruhi persepi ibu bapa terhadap keberkesanannya sebagai ibu bapa. Hasil kajian menunjukkan kepentingan mengambilkira konteks di mana ibu bapa dan anak berinteraksi apabila membantu ibu bapa. Ibu bapa juga perlu diberi kesedaran tentang kepentingan interaksi yang berkualiti dengan anak dan impak pengetahuan keibubapaan terhadap keberkesanan keibubapaan dan perkembangan kanak-kanak.

ABSTRACT

The present study determined the relationships between selected factors within the family social context i.e. family background: education, family income, and number of children; and parenting factors: quality of parenting received as a child, satisfaction with the parent-child relationship, and parenting knowledge) and perception of parental efficacy. Respondents were 118 parents with Standard Five children from 2 primary schools in Subang Jaya, and were selected using the stratified-random sampling procedure. Data were gathered using a self-administered questionnaire. Perceived parental efficacy was measured using Luster's perception of parental efficacy scale . Quality of parenting received as a child was measured using a modified version of Simons *et al.'s* supportive parenting scale. Satisfaction with the parent-child relationship was assessed using 5 items adapted from Simons *et al.'s* relationship satisfaction scale and Umberson's parent-child rational quality scale. Parenting knowledge was measured using 5 items adapted from Simons *et al.'s* parental influence scale and Rozumah's parenting knowledge scale. Results from the study show that at the bivariate level, family income, parent-child relationship satisfaction, and parenting knowledge are significantly related to perception of parental efficacy. When all of the family social context variables were statistically controlled, only parenting knowledge showed significant contribution to perception of parental efficacy. The study concludes that several factors within the social context of the family may influence parents perception of their efficacy. Findings from the study indicate the importance of considering the context in which the parent and child interact when working with parents. In addition, parents should be made aware of the importance of quality parent-child interaction and the impact of parenting knowledge on parental efficacy and child development.

INTRODUCTION

As our society becomes more and more industrialized, there is a danger of parents becoming too involved in providing their families with the economic necessities and neglecting their children's psycho-social needs. Parents will tend to spend more time in paid employment outside the home, thus leaving them with very little time to interact with their children. Low level parent-child interaction is expected to be detrimental not only to parents' perception of their parenting efficacy, but also to their children's development (Luster and Kain 1987; Simons *et al.* 1990; Teti and Gelfand 1991).

Luster and Kain defined perceived parental efficacy as the degree of belief parents have regarding their influence on the development of their children. They noted that some parents believe that they have a major impact upon their children's value, self-concept and life choices, while others believe that these factors are largely beyond their control. According to Simons *et al.* (1990), when a parent believes that he or she has no skill or competence in getting a fruitful result in a particular parenting activity, he or she will invest very little time and energy in it. This behaviour is consistent with Bandura's (1989) theory of self-efficacy, which states that people who have a high sense of efficacy visualize success scenarios that yield positive guides for performance and they cognitively rehearse good solutions to potential problems. Those who judge themselves as inefficacious tend to visualize failure scenarios and often dwell on how things will go wrong. Bandura further asserts that such inefficacious thoughts weaken motivation and undermine performance.

The present study was designed to determine the relationships between selected factors within the family social context and perceptions of parental efficacy. These factors include family background (i.e. parent's level of education, family income, number of children) and parenting factors (i.e. quality of parenting received as a child, satisfaction with parent-child relationship, and parenting knowledge). The selection of variables for the present study was influenced by past research. Furthermore, proponents of the ecological perspective emphasized the importance of considering the context in which the parents and child interact in order to understand parenting and parental efficacy (Bronfenbrenner 1979; Belsky 1984; Bubolz and Sontag 1993).

Few researchers have focused on the influence of factors within the social context of the family on the perception of parental efficacy. However, these researchers have provided evidence that parents who have higher levels of educational attainment and family income, have fewer children, experienced quality parenting during childhood, have a satisfying relationship with their children, and have a higher level of parenting knowledge, perceive themselves as having a higher level of parental efficacy (e.g. Luster and Kain 1987; Teti and Gefland 1991). Luster and Kain (1987) examined the relationships between several variables associated with a parent's status in society (for example, income, education, occupation, race and marital status) and perceived parental efficacy. Parents in the study were asked, "Considering all the things that can influence children today, how much effect do you think parents can have in determining how their children will turn out — — a great deal, a fair amount, a little, or almost none?" The study found that majority of the parents surveyed (n = 3,000) thought that parents exerted "a great deal" of influence on the developing child. Only 7% of those sampled perceived that parents could do little or nothing to influence how children turned out. Race, education and income were found to be significant predictors of perceived efficacy. The study concluded that parents who are highly educated and financially secure are more likely to perceive themselves as being highly influential than low socio-economic status parents.

The number of children in the family can change or modify a parent's beliefs or perception of his or her parenting effectiveness. Findings from previous studies indicate that parents with a larger number of children demonstrate less effective parenting behaviour (Blake 1989; Menaghan and Parcel 1991; Hannan and Eggebeen 1995), and thus are more likely to perceive themselves as inefficacious parents. These studies noted that having a greater number of children in the family could reduce the amount of individual parent-child interaction. In addition, these parents may be overwhelmed with the challenge of having to control and meet the needs of a larger number of children. Parents who have a poor sense of internal locus of control and poor perception of efficacy may therefore, be incapable of performing effectively as parents.

In his influential model of the determinants of parenting, Belsky (1984) explains that parent's psychological well-being and parental functioning may be traced back to the experiences parents had while growing up. The quality of parenting received during childhood has an effect on an adult parent's parenting ability and efficacy. Simons *et al.* (1993) found in their study on 451 two-parent families that parental satisfaction with their own children is related to the quality of parenting they received during childhood. The researchers assert that parents who have experienced and involved in supportive parenting when they were young have ideas conveyed to them that parenting is a pleasant and gratifying endeavour. These parents later take their parenting tasks positively, which subsequently help them to feel confident and efficacious as parents.

Past studies have shown that parental knowledge on child rearing influences the quality of care parents provide for their children (Parks and Smeriglio 1986; Rozumah 1995). Based on a sample of 126 mothers of varying socio-economic status, Parks and Smeriglio found that infant mental development is related to parenting knowledge. Mothers who understand the developmental needs of their infant were found to be more responsive to the infant. Rozumah's study on a sample of 60 Malay mothers with children aged 8 to 9 years lends support to this finding. The study revealed significant and positive relationships among parenting knowledge, quality of stimulation in the home, and children's academic performance. The findings seemed to imply that mothers with a higher level of parenting knowledge have a better insight into how to provide stimulation conducive to their children's development than mothers with a lower level of knowledge.

Many sociological and psychological theories have suggested that the parent-child relationship is one of the strongest social ties available to individuals, and has important implications for the parent's behaviour, attitudes, values and adjustments (Umberson 1989). Based on his study on 1502 parents, Umberson concludes that a positive parent-child relationship is beneficial to parents' psychological well-being, for it can enhance parents' self-confidence in performing their parenting tasks. Langenbrunner and Blanton (1993) interviewed 15 mothers and fathers regarding their level of satisfaction in their parent-child relationship. They found that parents with children who displayed affection to them and engaged in frequent verbal transaction with them, expressed higher levels of satisfaction in their relationship with their children. Such positive parent-child interaction will enable parents to perceive themselves as efficacious parents.

Thus, the literature reviewed indicates that parents' perception of their parenting efficacy is influenced by various factors embedded within the context in which the parent-child relationship is evolving. In line with past research and theory, the following hypotheses were tested in the study:

1. Respondents with a higher level of education are more likely to have a higher level of perceived parental efficacy.
2. Respondents with a higher level of family income are more likely to have a higher- level of perceived parental efficacy.
3. Respondents with fewer children are more likely to have a higher level of perceived parental efficacy.
4. Respondents who received better quality parenting during childhood are more likely to have a higher level of perceived parental efficacy.
5. Respondents who experienced a higher level of satisfaction in their parent-child relationship are more likely to have a higher level of perceived parental efficacy.
6. Respondents with a higher level of parenting knowledge are more likely to have a higher level of perceived parental efficacy.

METHOD

Sample

The research sample consisted of 118 parents from Subang Jaya, Selangor, who were identified via their Standard Five children using the stratified-randomized selection procedure. Of the 5 primary schools in Subang Jaya, two schools were selected at random–Sekolah Rendah Kebangsaan Subang Jaya and Sekolah Rendah Kebangsaan Sri Subang Jaya. From these two schools, 25 parents were randomly recruited through the cohort of all the 16 classes of Standard Five children. From the 400

questionnaires distributed to the children, only 161 were returned to the researchers. However, only 118 of the 161 questionnaires were complete and usable.

Data Collection

A bilingual (Malay and English) questionnaire was used as a tool for data collection. The questionnaire was taken home by the children, completed by either of the children's parents, and returned to the school after 3 days. The pretested questionnaire consists of 2 parts, the first focusing on the family social context variables (i.e. family background and parenting factors) and the second focusing on perception of parental efficacy.

The family background measures included age, gender, race, marital status, number of years of formal education completed, occupation, family income (total income of respondent and spouse) per month, and number of children in the family.

The parenting factors included in the analysis comprised three measures: quality of parenting received as a child (QPC), satisfaction with parent-child relationship and parenting knowledge.

The QPC was measured using a modified version of Simons *et al.*'s (1992) supportive parenting scale. The scale consists of 7 items that focus on various components of supportive parenting, for example, concern, communication and assistance. An example of an item included in the scale is: "How often did your parents talk to you about what was going on in your life during your childhood days?" The response format for each item on the scale is 1 'never', 2 'sometimes' (3 out of 10 occurrence), 3 'often' (6 out of 10 occurrence) and 4 'very often' (9 out of 10 occurrence). The total score on the scale is achieved by adding the scores of all 7 items. Scores attainable by the respondents ranged from 7 to 28. A high score on the scale indicates high quality parenting received by the respondent as a child, and vice-versa. Cronbach alpha for the scale was found to be 0.89.

The *parent-child relationship scale (PRS)* assesses parents' satisfaction with their relationship with their children. The scale consists of 5 items adapted from Simons *et al.*'s (1993) relationship satisfaction scale and Umberson's (1989) parent-child rational quality scale. Each item was rated on a four-point scale, from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). A sample item is, "Has being a parent to your child been an enjoyable experience?". Possible scores on the scale ranged from 5 to 20. Parents with high scores were considered to be experiencing a high level of satisfaction in their relationship with their children. Reliability assessment of the scale yielded an alpha coefficient of 0.88.

The *parenting knowledge (PK)* scale measures the extent to which parents understand the effect of their caregiving behaviour on the development of their children. The scale comprises 5 items (3 positive and 2 negative) adapted from Simon *et al.*'s (1993) parental influence scale and Rozumah's (1995) parenting knowledge scale. Examples of items on the scale are:

(i). Parents' behaviour largely determines a child's self-concept (e.g. self-image of a child) (positive).

(ii) Parents should treat their children like adult so that they can mature quickly (negative).

The response for each item on the PK scale ranged from 1 (strongly agree) to 4 (strongly disagree). Positive items were recorded so that higher scores indicated a higher level of parental knowledge. Scores attainable by the respondents on the scale ranged from 5 to 20. A high score on this measure indicates a high level of parenting knowledge. Cronbach alpha for the study sample was calculated to be 0.48.

The Perception of parental efficacy (POPE) scale was designed to measure two aspects of parent perception on effectiveness or efficacy–parent's perceived contingency and perceived importance of extrafamilial influences (Luster 1985). The instrument has 7 items (3 positive and 4 negative) with responses ranging from strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (4). Examples of positive and negative items are:

(i). The way children turn out has much to do with how their parents raised them (positive).

(ii). Success in bringing up a child has much to do with luck (negative).

The 3 positive items were recorded so that higher scores indicated a higher level of perceived efficacy. The highest score attainable on the scale is 28, and the lowest possible score is 7. High scores indicate a high level of perceived parental efficacy. Cronbach's alpha of the scale was calculated to be 0.48 for the study sample.

RESULTS

Descriptive Analysis

Table 1 displays the descriptive statistics of the sample, including the family social context variables and perception of parental efficacy. Seventy-eight of the respondents were fathers, and the rest (40) were mothers. A majority (54.2%) of the respondents were Malays, with Chinese (33.1%), Indians (11.9%) and others (0.8%). The age of the respondents ranged from 33 to 56 years with a mean of 41.8. Nearly all (96.6%) of the respondents were married at the time of the study. On average (50%), they completed secondary level (mean = 13.8 years, SD. = 3.9) education. The median of the total family income per month of the respondent was RM4548, and the mean was RM5338 (SD. = RM4583). The average number of children in the family was 3.5 (SD. = 1.6), and the range was from 1 to 12.

As presented in Table 1, the respondents' scores on the QPC ranged from 7 to 26, with a mean of 16.2 (SD. = 4.6). Most (71.4%) of the respondents scored between 10–20 points on the QPC scale. Only a small percentage (20.2%) of the respondents seemed to experience high quality parenting as a child. Nevertheless, the respondents tend to indicate that they have a high level of satisfaction in their relationships with their own children. Most of the respondents achieved high scores (>15) on the PRS scale. The PRS scores of the respondents ranged from 5 to 20, and the mean was 17.4 (SD. = 2.7). More than half (56.9%) of the respondents were also found to have a high level of parental knowledge. Their average scores on the PK scale was 15.8 (SD. = 1.9), and the range was from 8–20. The respondents' scores on the POPE ranged from 12 to 27, with a mean of 20.7 (SD. = 3.1). A large proportion (56.8%) of the respondents tend to perceive themselves as having a high level of parental efficacy (see Table 1).

Test of the Hypotheses

The Pearson product-moment correlation analyses were conducted to determine the relationships between the independent and the dependent variables as stated in hypotheses 1–6 presented earlier. Table 2 presents the results of the correlational analyses. The correlations

TABLE 1
Descriptive statistics of respondents and study variables (n = 128)

	n	%
Gender		
Male	78	66.1
Female	40	33.9
Race		
Malay	64	54.2
Chinese	39	33.1
Indian	14	11.9
Other	1	0.8
Age		
<40	34*	29.3
40 - 50	80	69.0
>50	2	1.7
Mean: 41.8		
SD: 4.4		
Marital Status		
Married	114	96.5
Divorced	3	2.5
Widowed	1	0.8
Education		
HSC or below	59	50.0
Diploma	18	15.3
Bachelor's degree	24	20.3
Master's degree	8	6.8
Ph.D. degree	2	1.7
Other professional qualification	7	5.9
Mean: 13.8 years		
SD: 3.9 years		
Monthly Family Income (RM)		
< 1000	22	16.6
1000 - 5000	82	68.7
>5000	14	14.7
Mean: 5,338		
SD: 4,583		
Number of Children		
<4	68	57.6
4 - 6	46	39.0
> 6	4	3.4
Mean: 3.5		
SD: 1.6		
QPC Scores		
< 10	10	8.4
10 û 20	84	71.4
>20	24	20.2
Mean: 16.2		
SD: 4.6		
PRS Scores		
< 10	3	2.5
10 û 15	19	16.0
> 15	96	81.5
Mean: 17.4		
SD: 2.8		

Table 1 (continued)

PK Scores		
< 10	2	1.6
10 û 15	49	41.5
> 15	67	56.9
Mean: 15.8		
SD: 1.9		
POPE Scores		
< 10	0	0.0
10 û 20	51	43.2
>20	7	56.8
Mean: 20.7		
SD: 3.1		

Note SD. = standard deviation. * Age of 2 respondents was not reported.
QPC scores = quality of parenting received during childhood
PRS scores = parent- child relationship satisfaction
PK scores = parenting knowledge
POPE scores = perception of parental efficacy

were found to be in the expected direction. However, the size of the correlation coefficients was small to moderate in magnitude. At the bivariate level, only three of the six hypotheses were supported (see Table 2). Family income ($r = 0.17$, $p < .05$), parent-child relationship satisfaction ($r = 0.23$, $p < .05$) and parenting knowledge ($r = .32$, $p < .05$) are positively and significantly correlated with parents' perception of efficacy. However, parents' level of education and number of children in the family and quality of parenting received during childhood are unrelated to perception of parental efficacy. The results of the bivariate correlational analyses therefore suggest that parents with a higher family income perceived themselves as more efficacious compared to parents with a lower family income. Similarly, parents with higher satisfaction in their relationships with their children and who have greater knowledge in parenting scored higher on the POPE scale.

TABLE 2
Correlation between family social context variables and perception of parental efficacy (n = 128)

Family Social Context	r	Significance Level
Education	0.08	0.19
Monthly family incmoe	0.17	0.04
Number of children	-0.08	0.18
QPC	0.09	0.15
PRS	0.23	0.01
PK	0.32	0.01

Note
QPC = quality of parenting received during childhood
PRS = parent- child relationship satisfaction
PK = parenting knowledge
POPE = perception of parental efficacy

To examine the combined effect of the family social context (family background and parenting factors) on the outcome of interest, and to identify which of the variables uniquely predicted the perception of parental efficacy when other variables are controlled, multiple regression analysis was performed. All of the independent variables were entered simultaneously in the analysis. In this way the percentage of variance accounted for by each of the variables could be determined.

Overall, the multiple regression model performance is modest, $F (6, 111) = 3.112$, $p < .05$ (see Table 3). All of the regression coefficients were in the expected direction except education (see Table 4). Table 4 also shows results of the beta weights on the regression analysis of perception of parental efficacy. Parental knowledge was found to be the only significant predictor of perception of parental efficacy when other family social context variables were controlled. The six family social context variables managed to explain only 14% of the variance in the POPE scores.

TABLE 3
Overall regression of perception of parental efficacy

Source	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Squares	R	R	²Sig. F
Regression	6	161.07607	26.84601	.37	.14	.007
Residual	111	957.54258	8.62651			
Total	117	1118.6186				

TABLE 4
Regression analysis on perception of parental efficacy

Variable	B	SE B	Beta	T	Sig T
Education	-0.023208	0.074742	.029207	-0.311	0.7568
Family income	8.874890	6.274704	0.131549	1.414	0.1600
Number of children	-0.162979	0.173521	-0.083196	-0.939	0.3496
QPC	0.039099	0.061056	0.057898	0.640	0.5232
PRS	0.104368	0.109724	0.93885	0.951	0.3436
PK	0.449027	0.158502	0.276860	2.833	0.005
Constant	11.561212	2.628782		4.398	0.000

Note.
QPC = quality of parenting received during childhood
PRS = parent-child relationship satisfaction
PK = parenting knowledge

DISCUSSION

The results of the present study on 118 parents with children in primary school provide information on the relationships between several factors within the family social context and perception of parental efficacy. The study found that at the bivariate level, family income is related to perception of parental efficacy. Parents with a higher family income perceived themselves as having a higher level of parental efficacy compared to those with lower family income. This finding is consistent with earlier research on parenting and parental efficacy (Luster and Kain 1987; McLyod 1990). Luster and Kain found that parents from high income families perceived themselves as more efficacious, while those in the lower income group saw themselves as incapable of influencing the development of their children. In addition, parents with financial strain experience greater emotional stress which could affect their ability to parent effectively McLyod (1990). This inability may, in turn, affect parents' perception on their efficacy.

Parent-child relationships, like other relationships, are interdependent and reciprocal (Anderson and Sabatelli 1995). The present study found a significant correlation between parent-child relationship satisfaction and perception of parental efficacy. Parents who are satisfied with the relationship they have with their children tended to perceive themselves as efficacious. This finding is consistent with findings from a large body of literature (e.g. Umberson 1989; Cheng *et al.*1991; Langenbrunner and Blanton 1993; Simons *et al.* 1993). These studies found that parents who are happy and satisfied with the relationship they have with their children perceive themselves as being able to control the developmental outcomes of their children. A healthy parent-child relationship may also enhance parents' confidence in performing their parental role. As Bigner (1994) noted, the parent-child relationship is the most significant and intimate relationship among humans. This special bond can be one of the most fulfilling of human experiences and a challenging opportunity for personal growth and development for an adult.

Knowledge of child development is indeed an important asset for parents. Results from the correlational analyses show that parenting knowledge is positively and significantly related to parental efficacy. After the effects of other family social context variables were statistically controlled, parenting knowledge was also found to uniquely predict parents' perception of their efficacy. This finding parallels those of past studies (e.g. Parks and Smeriglio 1986, Rozumah 1995), which indicated that parents with a higher knowledge of child development provide better quality child rearing than those with lower knowledge. Thus the findings tended to suggest that parents who are more conversant with parenting tended to have a better insight into their efficacy.

Based on the results, the present study concludes that several factors within the family social context may influence a parent's perception of his or her parenting efficacy. These

factors include family background characteristics (such as family income) and parenting factors (such as parent-child relationship satisfaction and parenting knowledge). Findings from this study have implications for family practitioners, family counsellors, family-life educators and those who work with parents. In particular, findings from this study will help those working with parents to consider the impact of family social context on parenting and parental efficacy. For example, parents with low socio-economic status may experience different stresses from high socio-economic status parents. Thus, the kind of intervention or parenting education programme offered to these two groups must be appropriately designed to their needs and circumstances. Appropriate strategies will encourage parents to perform their child-rearing tasks effectively; in this way perception of efficacy would be positively influenced.

The interactional processes evolving within the family system, especially between the parent and child subsystem, can shape parents' perception of their ability to influence the developmental outcomes of their children. Family development agents may, therefore, need to encourage parents to engage in positive and stimulating interaction with their children. Such healthy interaction would bring happiness and satisfaction to both parent and child. Parents who experience a high level of satisfaction in their relationship with their children will likely perceive themselves as more efficacious than parents with a low level of satisfaction.

As in previous studies, findings from the present study emphasize the importance of knowledge in childbearing and child development. Parenting education programmes should be made available to all parents regardless of their socio-economic status. Such programmes can create awareness among parents of the substantial influence of caregiving on development. Parents who are more knowledgeable will realize that they can control the way their children turn out.

The present study was subject to the limitations of a self-administered questionnaire. Future research may include a similar study using the interview technique so that the respondents' perception of their efficacy could be better described. The significant contribution of parenting knowledge to parental efficacy found in the present study underscores the importance of more work on this front. Furthermore, the low internal reliability obtained on the parental knowledge scale warrants further investigation.

The parenting role is only one of the many adult roles. It would be interesting to know how other adult roles such as a spouse, a worker or an employer influence perceived efficacy among parents. In addition, child characteristics such as age, gender, and temperamental disposition may be of interest to future researchers. Future studies may also compare the levels of parental efficacy between rural and urban parents, and between parents of different races. An ethnographic study would also further expand and refine our understanding of the determinants of parental efficacy.

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