Relationship between parental factors and learning attitude

Family

1. Background Academic performance is the priority to students as well as the teachers in any school system. Some of the socio-cultural factors which affect the students achievement are parents' educational status (M. Khata, et al. 2011). Parent educational status is used as an indicator of Socio Economic Status (SES) to reflect the potential for social and economic resources such as household incomes that are available to students because it tends to remain the same over time (Sirin 2005). Moreover, parenting practices are also essential in moulding the students into a successful person.

The supports and encouragement the students received from their parents bring a huge positive impact on their behaviour. Apart from that, learning attitudes of a student in term on participation in the class also play an important role in determining their performance. This factor is also depending on the gender of the students. Many cultures generally raise female to be obedient, responsible and take schoolwork seriously whereas males are given more freedom to do as they like and portray schoolwork as a generally feminine rather than masculine pursuit (Maynard, 2002). The local study also reported that girls had the tendency to achieve better attitudes toward learning than boys (Zainah 2007). This is a general stereotype accepted by the people in Malaysia.

2. Aim

The purpose of this research was to determine the relationship between family factors such as their parents' household income, educational status as well as parental supports and the students' learning behaviours based on gender with their academic achievements in the secondary schools.

Household income: Household income refers to total income accrued to members of a household, both in cash and/or in kinds on a regular basis in one year or more often. Educational status: Educational attainment or level of education of individuals. (Definitions. net. 2013) Academic achievement: The level of actual accomplishment or proficiency one has achieved in an academic area, as opposed to one's potential. (Dpsnc. net 2013) Secondary school: a school intermediate between elementary school and college and usually offering general, technical, vocational, or college-preparatory courses (Merriam-webster. com 2012)

3. Method

4. 1 The sample The sample size was made up of a total of 25 students from different secondary schools in Malaysia. These respondents were randomly selected from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds and gender. However their ages were limited to a range between 16 to 17 years old. The students' distribution is as follows: 13 participants from form 4 students (16 years old), and 12 participants from form 5 students (17 years old). As for gender, 10 were girls and 15 were boys.

4. 2 Measure of academic achievement

Since PMR results are represented by letter grades, it is the norm to consider only the total number of A's obtained as a benchmark of excellent achievement. The number of subjects taken in PMR usually range from 7 to 9, thus respondents were categorized into two categories, that were high achievers and low achievers. High achievers were those who obtained 6 A's

and above while low achievers were students who obtained 5 A's and below (Ainudin Dahlan, et. al. 2005)

4. 3 Data collection

A questionnaire was used to obtain the data which consisted of three parts and comprised of 22 questions. Part A of the questionnaire contained questions soliciting background information from the students. Part B consisted of a set of questions on their families and parents attitudes towards their education and also on their time management as well as on cognitive skills. The last part, Part C was designed with questions to find out their behaviour in the classes. All the surveys then were analyzed using Microsoft Excel in which the bar and pie charts were used to represent the results of each item.

4. 4 Measure of effect of family factors and students' learning attitudes From the questionnaire Part B, the mean of the results was calculated and it was 65%. From this calculation, parameter for families who paid good and poor attention to their children studies can be set. The mean from the Part C, which is 55%, was used to differentiate the students who showed better learning attitudes toward education during the classes in their respective schools.

4. 5 Measure of family economic status

In this research, students were grouped into two categories of household income: low-income and high-income. The national definition of low-income households is households whose monthly income is RM2, 000 and below

(Country Report Malaysia 2011). Students whose parents' income is more than that were considered into the second category.

5. Findings From the surveys, 60% of the students were classified as high achieving students which comprised of 5 female and 10 male students. Another 40% (10 respondents) were 5 female and 5 male students.

5. 6 Findings regarding family factors

In this research, the parental support showed a significant role on their children academic performance. Ten of the respondents who were high-achievers (67%) claimed that their parents did give a lot of attention and moral supports to them. On the other hand, about one third of the low-achievers also mentioned that their parents also did the same thing. However, a large proportion (70%, or 7 respondents) of them said that their families displayed lack of encouragement and involvement in their academic achievements. The study also showed that there was significant relationship between parents' income with academic performance.

The household income of these families represented the parent's educational status and the sectors in which they worked (either in professional or traditional sectors). 84% of the students (21 respondents) were from high-income families. However, only one academically successful student (4%) came from family with low-income household whereas 12% (3 respondents) of the under-achievers were from the same group.

5. 7 Findings regarding learning behaviour

Turning to the attitudes toward education in term of participation in the classes, two-third of the high achievers (10 respondents, or 4 females and 6

males) showed that that they have strong commitment in classroom activities and higher educational aspirations. This figure was then categorised based on gender and it showed that females were more dedicated in their studies compared to males. The percentages of the results for females and males students were 80% and 60% respectively (refer to the Table 4. 1 in the appendices). In contrast to other group, 8 respondents from the low-achiever category (80%) portrayed lack of interest in the classes. This figure was made up of 5 male and 3 female students.

5. Conclusion

6. 8 Commentary The comparison of the low-achievers and high-achievers as determined by self-reported PMR results revealed that there were statically significant differences between themselves on family's factor and on the students' learning behaviour based on their gender. It is also interesting many male respondents claimed that they did not participate well in the classes and yet they still classified into the group of high-achievers.

However, the number of respondent who was under-achiever was clearly dominated by male group. These results suggest that the statement made by Zainah in her article " Why Boys are lagging behind girls" in the New Strait Times (refer to the http://www. nib. com. my/cross-search/search/_1365378117/) on the reasons why and stereotype of males student in schools, is indeed true. Previous studies by Martini (1995) and Walker et al., (1998) also showed that students who come from low-income and single-parent homes have significantly less school success than students from high socio-economic families (recited by M. Khata, et al.

2011). This means that the results from this research are tally with others studies.

6. 9 Recommendations Result of the study shows that family dimension especially the parents is one of the most dominant factors that affect student achievement. Thus, parents are recommended to take heed and give attention not only to the internal but also the external factors which may influence the learning attitudes of their children. Parents are also suggested to consider environmental their children's personality. In addition, parents also need to know about their children's social beings, not only at home but also at school.

According to McClun & Merrel (1998), parents, friends and peer as well as the community have great influence and impact on personality, behaviour and self concept of children which will affect their education (recited by Azizi, et al. 2009). Furthermore, parents should also be actively involved with the Parents Teachers Association (PTA), so that they can cooperate better with the schools to plan activities where closer relationships among parents, students and teacher can be strengthened. This close relationship will indirectly influence the students' attitudes and behaviour toward their studies. So, both government and schools need to focus and concern more on parent awareness programs in education (Darling 2008).