A SURVEY ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PARENTS’ SOCIOECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS AND STUDENTS’ ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

by

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ABSTRACT

A SURVEY ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PARENTS' SOCIOECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS AND STUDENTS' ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

Rokiah bt Mantali

This study aims to examine the relationship between parents' socioeconomic characteristics and students' academic achievement. The present study was done in order to determine the relationship between parents' socioeconomic characteristics and students' academic achievement in urban areas. The study was conducted in the Kuching town. Simple random sampling was utilized in identifying or selecting the sample, which consists of 200 students from various demographic groups. However, only 170 questionnaires returned by the respondents can be considered as usable data. Data for the study were collected by questionnaires distributed to all the respondents. The relationships between parents' socioeconomic characteristics and students' academic achievement were assessed using Pearson Correlation. Meanwhile, a hierarchical multiple regression analysis was used to determine the extent to which parents' socioeconomic characteristics affect students' academic achievement based on the relevant literature reviews. Subsequently, the students' academic achievement were assessed based on their second term score on three selected subjects namely as Bahasa Melayu, English Language and Mathematics. The results of this study indicated significant relationships between parents' socioeconomic characteristics and students' academic achievement. The study concludes that students' academic achievement is influenced by the parents' socioeconomic characteristics. Programmes that enhance students' academic achievement by taking into consideration parents' socioeconomic characteristics are recommended for students' academic future betterment.
ABSTRAK

KAJI SELIDIK MENGENAI PERKAITAN DI ANTARA CIRI-CIRI SOSIOEKOonomI IBUBAPA DAN PENCAPAIAN AKADEMIK PELAJAR

Rokiah bt Muntali

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.0. Introduction

There is considerable evidence of the association between academic achievement and social class background, as represented by parental educational and occupational position (Coleman, 1966). According to Robinson (1993), some authors have argued that studies of the effects of family background on student achievement can be improved by the insertion of a broader range of family background indicators and more culturally valid indicators of social and material background.

Consequently, this research attempts to investigate the relationship between parents' socioeconomic characteristics and students' academic achievement. Socioeconomic characteristics such as parents' educational level, parental occupational status, parental income, family size and socioeconomic status are variables in this research.

This chapter discusses the background of the study, statement of the problem, research objectives, research questions, significance of the study and definition of terms.
1.1. Background of the Study

A research conducted by Berns (1993) has shown a relationship between family background and students’ academic achievement. Noraini (1994) has also pointed out similar view that students with high socioeconomic status are able to perform well in their studies and achieve higher grades in their examinations compared to students from low socioeconomic status.

According to Caldas and Bandston (1999), parents with high socioeconomic status are able to provide facilities needed by their children and simultaneously accommodate them with the suitable learning environment. On the contrary, parents with the low socioeconomic status are facing problems to accommodate their children with sufficient necessity due to the financial constraint.

Therefore, in order to understand how these socioeconomic characteristics affect students’ academic achievement, it is crucial to conduct a study on parental involvement by looking at the parents’ socioeconomic characteristics for the betterment of students’ academic achievement in future.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Lareau (1987) concluded that parental involvement resulted in higher student achievement, positive attitudes toward school, and improvement in homework habits. The authors also suggested that parents with higher socioeconomic status are more involved in their child’s education than parents of lower socioeconomic status. It appears that students’ academic achievement is related to the socioeconomic status. On the other hand, Epstein and Dauber (1991) stated that families, in which parents have a
low socioeconomic status and educational level, have negative attitudes toward education and are not involved in their child’s school. Therefore, this study is to be conducted to determine to what extent parents’ socioeconomic characteristics such as parents’ educational level, parental occupational status, parental income, family size as components of socioeconomic status that are associated with students’ academic achievement.

1.3. Research Objectives

The purpose of this study is to:

1.3.1. find out the relationship between parents’ socioeconomic characteristics and students’ academic achievement; and

1.3.2. determine to what extent parents’ socioeconomic characteristics namely as parents’ educational level, parental occupational status, parental income and family size as components of socioeconomic status that are related to students’ academic achievement.

1.4. Research Questions

To examine the relationship between parents’ socioeconomic characteristics and students’ academic achievement, the following questions are posed:

1.4.1. Is there a relationship between parents’ socioeconomic characteristics and students’ academic achievement?

1.4.2. To what extent are the differences in students’ academic achievement explained by parents’ educational level, parental occupational status, parental income and family size as components of socioeconomic status that are related to students’ academic achievement?
1.5. Significance of the Study

This study aims to find out the relationship between parents’ socioeconomic characteristics and students’ academic achievement, therefore it has the potential to add support in terms of information or insight on parents’ and their children’s education. Lewis (2001) suggested that the issues surrounding parent involvement and student academic achievement are significant within the theoretical context of identifying relationships that exist and prescribing the inclusion of particular typologies that enhance student achievement. Furthermore, government and Ministry of Education (MOE) as well as schools may be able to initial effort to support or to improve parents’ socioeconomic characteristics in order to enhance students’ academic achievement.

1.6. Definition of Terms

1.6.1. Socioeconomic Characteristics

Socioeconomic characteristics as claimed by Okpala, Smith and Jones (2000), can be referred to socioeconomic status, including parental income, parental occupational status and parental educational level. In this study, it is great concern to correlate the socioeconomic characteristics to the students’ academic achievement in order to see what extent they are related.

1.6.2. Achievement

AbiSamra (2000) defines achievement as quality and quantity of a student’s work. It encompasses students’ ability and performance, intricately related to human growth and cognitive, emotional, social and physical development. It is not related to a single instance, but occurs across time and levels, through students’ life in public school and on into post secondary years and working life. Thus, in this study the
quality and quantity of students’ work are to be analysed based on their performance in school-based examination.

### 1.6.3. Parents’ Educational Level

Educational level is the amount of formal education as individual has completed which is documented by the certificates or degrees or the equivalent the person has earned, (Robinson, 1993). In this study, parents’ educational level is used as an indicator of the opportunities for job security, income, parents’ awareness towards their children’s education and socioeconomic status as well.

### 1.6.4. Parental Occupational Status

Occupational status is a promising measure of social position that can provide information about job characteristics, such as environmental and working condition, decision-making latitude, and psychological demands of the job (Williams and Collin, 1995). In this study, parental occupational status is classified into two categories. One category was less than a bachelor’s degree and the other is Master’s degree to Ph.D. or other advanced professional degree.

### 1.6.5. Parental Income

Department of Community Colleges and Workforce Development (2006) defines income as the money earnings received from work performed as an employee by a member of a family. In this study, parental income refers to wages or money earnings by either father or mother or both of them as the breadwinners of the family.
1.6.6. **Family Size**

Bakri Musa (2006) states that family size refers to number of children or family members need to be supported by the breadwinner or head of the family.

1.6.7. **Socioeconomic Status**

Bollen, Glanville and Stecklov (2001), defined socioeconomic status as a complex variable that measures an individual position in the social stratification system. The social stratification is based on the access or control of material or non-material resources. Hence, socioeconomic status is sometimes conceptualized as a unitary concept, measured by looking at the individuals’ income, occupational status and educational level.
2.0. Introduction

Students’ academic achievement is a crucial issue in education today. For decades, educational researchers, educational practitioners and the public at large have assumed that socioeconomic status (SES) is one of the best predictors of academic achievement (Marzano, 2003). Hence, there has been significant research done on correlating students’ academic achievement with their parents’ socioeconomic status. Though there are many different factors determining socioeconomic status, the socioeconomic characteristics such as parents’ educational level, parental occupational status, parental income and family size as components of socioeconomic status that are the determining factors in this study.

This chapter presents the related literature and researches, which have been done precedingly by various researchers regarding the relationship between parents’ socioeconomic characteristics and students’ academic achievement. Parents’ socioeconomic characteristics, for the purpose of this study were devoted entirely to presenting the outcomes or relationship of parents’ socioeconomic status as related to students’ academic achievement. This chapter discusses the following: parents’ socioeconomic status, theoretical perspectives, parents’ educational level, parental
occupational status, parental income and family size as components of socioeconomic status.

2.1. Parents' Socioeconomic Status

Parents' socioeconomic status has been suggested as a predictor of students' academic achievement. The stress and lack of social support to parents in poor families may adversely affect parents’ support for school success, and thus, children's intellectual development (National Commission on Excellent in Education, 1994). Parent involvement has also been shown to be a factor in academic achievement.

Henderson (1987) provides evidence that higher student achievement is related to parents' involvement in the schools. Parents, not just educators, need to invest their time and interest to create the social force necessary for change. Fouts, Abbott and Baker (2001), revealed that parents of high achieving students had distinct styles of interacting with their children. They created emotionally supportive home environments and provided reassurance when their children encountered failure. They viewed school performance as being accomplished through regular practice and work accepted responsibility for assisting their children to acquire learning strategies.

Another illustration of the other studies relating achievement to socioeconomic status done in Hong Kong comparing critical thinking skills among students from different economic backgrounds, found a large difference between the critical thinking and motivation levels of students from different socioeconomic backgrounds (Cheung, Yue and Anna, 2001). This study showed that students from upper class excelled in critical thinking as compared with students of lower class. Although this article
discusses academic achievement, it does not speculate as to the reasons for the disparity between achievement levels of students from different backgrounds in terms of learned class values.

Cheung, Yue and Anna (2001) claims that although the study concentrates on lower motivation and critical thinking levels in lower class students, simultaneously it shows that “students who had fewer resources, engaged more on the physical stresses”. The physical stresses on lower status students can potentially be greater than that of higher status students, which can affect their academic achievement. Even though the data from previous studies seemed inconsistent, they were largely based on similar measures of parents’ socioeconomic status, which may indicate a problem with using parents’ income, and occupational status as a measure of socioeconomic status.

Consequently, parents’ socioeconomic characteristics are the major concern related to students’ academic achievement since parents can be viewed as the best partners in their children’s education and development. Parents have always been the nurturers and caregivers by modelling and the most importantly supporting their children needs, simultaneously being responsible for their livelihood. Hence, the results or findings for the study “A Survey on the Relationship between Parents’ Socioeconomic Characteristics and Students’ Academic Achievement” might show either positive or negative relationship dependable on the parents’ socioeconomic status.
2.2. Theoretical Perspectives on Students’ Socioeconomic Status and Achievement

Three theoretical perspectives currently exist about parents’ socioeconomic status and students’ academic achievement. Each perspective underlies the relationship between socioeconomic status and academic achievement.

The first theoretical perspective has shown student’s socioeconomic status contributes to his or her success, with a positive correlation. This research simply reiterates that the correlation between student socioeconomic status and student academic achievement is strong. Hence, a research should be done to level out that relationship (Caldas and Bankston, 1999). It seems as if good things come to those who are privileged, though it is vital for all children to have educational advantages, regardless of their economic status.

Another perspective is highlighted by White (1982) based on Coleman report which is similar to the first perspective. White explained that the ‘Coleman Report’, confirmed for educators what they thought they already knew: “that a strong relationship exists between all kinds of achievement variables and what has to be known as socioeconomic status (SES)”. White also notes that the belief in the strong relationship between SES and student achievement is so pervasive that it has rarely been questioned. To illustrate, Marzano (2003) pointed out that family characteristic that is the most powerful predictor of school performance is socioeconomic status (SES). This is because as the SES of the student’s family at the higher level, the higher his academic achievement will be achieved. This relationship has been documented in innumerable studies and seems to hold no matter what measure of status is used namely
as occupation of principal breadwinner, family income, parents’ education, or some combination of these family characteristics.

The third perspective claimed that children whose parents are of higher socioeconomic status are more likely to have higher IQs, test better and advance their education further than those of a lower socioeconomic status (Levitt and Dubner, 2005). This may be due to several reasons such as genetics. For instance, if the parents received advanced education, they are probably intelligent and therefore passed that on to their children. These parents are more likely to value education because of their experience in the effects of higher education (Levitt and Dubner, 2005). Meanwhile, students whose parents do not have advanced degrees do not have time or money to spend on helping their children advance to a higher level. Therefore, a cycle is created where those in middle and lower classes generally remain in those classes.

Based on the three theoretical perspectives existed, students of higher socioeconomic status seemed to be pleased by their status in term of academic achievement as compared to students of lower socioeconomic status. It is no doubt that parents of higher socioeconomic status are more involved in their children’s education and able to provide their children’s basic material needs. Meanwhile, parents of lower socioeconomic status are not so much involved in their children’s education due to the physical stress and lack of consciousness on the importance of education to their children. However, this claim should not generalizable to all of the parents from both statuses since the findings may be overturned.
2.3. Parents’ Educational Level

Children’s academic achievement in school has been demonstrated to be directly correlated with the parents’ level of education particularly on the mother’s part, as mother is usually the first teacher (Weinstein, 1994). Analysis of extensive research suggests that the most important influences on students’ academic achievement that have changed favorably are parents’ educational levels. A comparison made to families in 1970’s and families in 1990’s particularly in America had shown that more highly educated parents have fewer children (Grissimer, 1994). These factors are primary reasons that positive changes in family characteristics would predict higher student achievement. McNeal (1999), claims that one of the most persistent findings in such research is that a child’s subsequent attainment is highly correlated with the education of the child’s parents.

According to Epstein (1986) although, on average the more highly educated families, the more they are involved in their children education. Parents who have not had educational opportunities are also supportive of schools and desire a quality education for their children. Many parents feel uncomfortable with the schools because they had to quit school or had an unpleasant experience in their own schooling. Regardless of one’s choice of theoretical perspectives, a persistent relationship remains between a parent’s educational attainment and that of his or her child. Of utmost importance, studies show that educated parents translate information more successfully into family practices that help to manage and monitor the education of their early adolescents (Biblarz, 1997).
In addition, prior to the 20th century, positive role models were central to child rearing practices. However, a larger role for parents emerged during the early 20th Century with the trend toward discipline and punishment (Zellman and Waterman, 1998). Furthermore, parent education is heightened with the emergence of parent education groups, parent cooperatives and parent-teacher organizations. The goal was to educate parents about proper ways to nurture their children, to understand and support the function of the education system, and to understand the norms of society and their ability to adapt to them.

In fact, families bring with them different expectations of formal and informal education. Some parents may regard interaction with children in palsy as spoiling them or they may use physical discipline to deal with their children’s misbehaviour (McCollum and Russo, 1993). Some believe learning involves only a child and a teacher, not a parent. Yet others may have low expectations for educational achievement for their children due to their own lack of education. However, this matter will not happen among the educated parents since they are aware of the importance of education and their roles as the role model to their children. Thus, they will try to provide and support their children education in terms of psychological and emotional needs for better academic achievement.

In addition, a study conducted by Noraini (1989) had shown that parents’ educational level influenced the parents’ involvement in their children activities especially in educational matters. In short, perceptibly parents’ involvements in nurturing their children tend to be high once they possessed higher educational background.
Indeed, it is obviously that parents’ educational, occupational status and their incomes will influence parental expectations and parenting style towards their children’s academic achievement.

2.4. Parental Occupational Status

Occupational status is one component of socioeconomic status (SES), summarizing the power, income and educational requirements associated with various positions in the occupational structure. According to Williams and Collins (1995), occupational status has several advantages over the other major indicators of SES, which are most commonly educational attainment and family income.

Parental occupational status with respect in this study reflects the outcome of parents’ attitudes towards children educational attainment and the associated monetary and other rewards. For example, professionals are differentiated from manual workers by selection on educational attainment that influences patterns of remuneration. It is also likely to be a better indicator of income over the long term than is income information collected at any single point in time, for the reason that in the short term, income can be quite volatile (Williams and Collins, 1995). Furthermore, occupational status is a promising measure of social position that can provide information about job characteristics, such environmental and working conditions, decision-making opportunity, and psychological demands of the job. The measures of occupational status however are based on some combination of the educational requirements and monetary rewards associated with the position.