

CHAPTER 7

Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

In the preceding chapters of this study, the grade distribution of students from various backgrounds in three subjects, namely Bahasa Malaysia, English and Mathematics at the SPM examination has been examined. In addition, the factors affecting the academic performance of students and the characteristics of students who achieved excellent results in the three subjects was also analysed. The data for this study was obtained from the survey conducted in 1989 for the University Malaya's tracer study on "Transition from School to Work" (Chew et al., 1995)

The objective of this research paper is to examine the performance of students in Bahasa Malaysia, English and Mathematics at the SPM examination with reference to demographic, home environment and education background variables and identify the factors that affect the performance of students in the respective subjects. This study also examines the characteristics of high achievers in the three subjects.

This chapter will focus on some important results and findings observed through out the analysis. Discussion on the implication of this study and recommendations will be also included in this chapter.

7.2 Summary Of Findings

Student's performance in the three subjects at the SPM examinations varies according to many factors namely, demographic, home environment and education background. Although the variables that affect student performance differ from subject to subject, one variable, which is prior achievement, in the respective subjects, was found to have the greatest effect on performance of all three subjects. In other words, students who have performed well in the SRP examination will most likely perform well in SPM examinations.

The differentials in Bahasa Malaysia grades are not as obvious as the differentials of grades in English and Mathematics. Most students have done well in Bahasa Malaysia regardless of gender, ethnicity, family size, childhood residence, and socio-economic status of father and medium of instruction. This could be due to the fact that Bahasa Malaysia is the medium of instructions in schools as well as the national language of this country. Hence, students are trained from the early stages of their education to become proficient in Bahasa Malaysia.

Nevertheless there is significant difference in the performance of students who went through primary education in Chinese and Malay medium schools. Students studying in Chinese schools have very little exposure in Bahasa Malaysia and this results in poor grades.

English performance varies greatly across student's ethnicity, childhood residence, fathers' education and income level and stream of study. High percentage of failure among Bumiputera students is partly attributed to childhood residence and fathers' occupational sector. Majority of students who grew up in rural areas compared to students from small and large towns have failed English. This is partly due to the influence of the student's fathers' education level. Students whose fathers' are highly educated have performed well in English. The performance of science students was far better than the arts stream students.

Students who have done well in Mathematics are mainly from small families, and science stream. A good proportion of students these are from small and large towns. Students whose fathers' have upper secondary and tertiary education have done well in Mathematics compared students from families with parents who are less educated.

The differences in academic performance of students in the SPM examination, specially in Mathematics and English would have to be addressed for further improvement. For years, concerned educationist has called for attention to the deteriorating proficiency among school children in English among school children. The generation of poor English speakers and users have gone through university education for some time now. It is common knowledge even graduates struggle to converse in English in job interviews. It goes without saying that English is the language of Information Technology.

The former Finance Minister Tun Daim Zainuddin in his Budget speech last October, 2000 called for Malaysians to be more proficient in English to meet the demands of a knowledge – based society (K-Economy) (The Star, 8/11/2000). He said, statistics from local IT companies show that only 1 percent of websites use Bahasa Malaysia.

As with any other problem, the best solution is to get to the root of the issue. It is necessary to build the foundation for English from primary school and not hope that the students will acquire the language skills at later stages. The cabinet has recently accepted recommendations made by a special committee to improve students' performance in English (The Star, 30/5/2001). These recommendations include

- (i) allowing students to choose from three English papers to sit for their SPM examination from 2003;
- (ii) allowing primary school students from 2003 to be taught according to their level of proficiency in English instead of following a fixed yearly syllabus;
- (iii) hiring foreign native speakers of English to teach at teacher training colleges and schools especially in rural schools.

English should be given more emphasis in all schools. Another practical approach would be to set more time for English language lessons and increase efforts to encourage reading among students. Shortage of English teachers must be viewed seriously. Steps must be taken to train more teachers to teach English. While increasing the quantity may pose a problem, the quality must be emphasized.

The policy makers today are giving great emphasis to the learning of science and technology. The importance of the subject is a forgone conclusion and therefore more emphasis must be given right from the start. In order for this to be successful, it necessary for the younger generation to have a good foundation in Mathematics. It is the general perception that students with better mathematics grades are able to grasp science better. The Ministry of Education should review the present curriculum in view of the increasingly poorer performance in Mathematics among students especially in the rural areas. Raising achievement is never easy, but the controversy that currently swirls about mathematics and how best to teach it makes the administrator's task even more challenging.

The Ministry of Education need to become as informed as possible about the issues, the research, and most particularly about what materials and methods have the potential to produce the achievement we desire for all of our students. Mathematics teachers should be trained to teach effectively and interestingly. The number of qualified Mathematics teachers should be increased especially in rural areas. These teachers must know substantial Mathematics and have strong pedagogical skills if they are to be effective in helping their students and meet high standards. It is essential that teachers receive adequate preparation in Mathematics content and pedagogy and in the use of contemporary technological tools before they enter the classroom. Examples from daily life can be used to make Mathematics lesson more enjoyable in classroom especially at primary school level. Getting students to participate in Science and Mathematics projects will further increased their interest in these subjects.

As most tuition centers are located in urban areas, rural students do not have access to them even if they can afford it. To overcome this problem, the Ministry of Education could possibly conduct intensive revision classes and remedial classes for the weak students during school holidays. Resource centers equipped with additional reference books, magazines and computers can be set up in rural areas to motivate students to study.

The issues related to the poor performance of students in English and Mathematics seems to be of concern to the policy makers. There is much publicity and discussion on these issues. It appears that the Ministry of Education is in the process of reemphasizing the English language and giving greater importance to Mathematics. These efforts will most likely result in a nation competent in Bahasa Malaysia, English and Mathematics.