

## Abstract

This study explores the various factors that affect academic performance of upper secondary schools students in three subjects namely Bahasa Malaysia, English, and Mathematics at the SPM examinations. The purpose of the study is to examine the performance of students in the three subjects and investigate the factors affecting academic performance of students in these subjects. The data for this study was obtained from the survey conducted by University of Malaya in 1989 (Chew et al., 1995)

The findings of this study show that prior achievement (SRP subject grades) exert the greatest influence on performance of students in the SPM examination. Students who have performed well in SRP examination will do well in SPM examination. Grade differentials are observed across gender, ethnicity and childhood residence especially for performance in English and Mathematics. Fathers' education is another important variable in explaining differences in students' performance. However, fathers' occupation and income level are not significant contributory factors towards academic performance. In terms of demographic variables, performance of female students is found to be higher than male students in Bahasa Malaysia. On the contrary, the performance of male students is better in Mathematics. There is not much gender difference in the performance in English.

Indian students performed exceptionally well in English while Chinese students were top performers in Mathematics. Rural students' performance in English and Mathematics were much poorer compared to students from small and large towns. Students from small families generally performed better than students from big families.

The factors that had least influence on academic performance of students in the three subjects were birth order, students' guardian relationship, parental interest and support, type and frequency of reading newspaper, text, reference books and magazines.