CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION


In the past, the participation of adolescents in the world of work was a common phenomenon in Malaysia. The 1980 population census report shows that over 560,000 children between the ages 10 to 19 were involved in work activity in Peninsular Malaysia. Helping parents in the fields or in shops, working for others in small firms and cottage-based production were prevalent. Many of these youngsters worked because of economic necessity. Poverty necessitated the use of young labour as a source of additional income. Their economic activities include domestic work and non-domestic work in either wage employment or unpaid family work.

Schooling then played relatively insignificant role in the lives of children from poor families. Many children gave up school at an early age in order to work and contribute to their households. Although educational qualifications promise economic improvement, the harsh reality of poverty made dropping-out of school a realistic choice for poor children, enabling them to earn an income and possibly to acquire some skills. The Dropout Study (1973) by the Ministry of Education reported that 20 per cent of the pupils dropped out of school after completing primary education. These
dropouts formed the majority of young workers involved in full time low-paying and unskilled jobs.

Child participation in the labour force started to decline from the beginning of the late 70s due to employment regulations as well as the expansion and promotion of free schooling. The decline was especially significant with reference to young labour in full-time employment but, nonetheless, young labour in part-time employment was still prevalent in Malaysia. It especially persisted in certain types of 'informal' establishments and in family production. The young labour was very much in use in casual part-time jobs and during occasional periods or seasons, especially when there was no conflict with schooling. In a study on children (aged 12 to 16) participation in work in Peninsular Malaysia, Mary George (1991) found 65% of a sample of 113 respondents participated in work activity while attending school. She also noted that those who worked were mainly from lower income families.

During the 1990's, the trend of students working part-time has become more widespread. Recent years have witnessed a marked increase in the number of Malaysian adolescents who work while attending school. Students take on jobs after school hour, on weekends or during school holidays, with many working from five to as much as fifteen hours per week on a regular schedule.
Many believe that student working part-time is the result of social and economic changes that have occurred in the country over the past two decades. Chief among these changes is the widespread shift from an agricultural to a manufacturing/service economy. From 1970 to 1995, jobs in retail trade, manufacturing and personal services have increased from 23.2% to 57.6% of the nation's total employment (Second Malaysian Plan, Fifth Malaysian Plan).

The result has been a large increase in minimum wage, entry-level positions that are highly suitable for secondary school students who are seeking part-time work. In the urban areas, fast-food stores, restaurants, departmental stores, retailers and hotels are the main employers of secondary school students. Here, they work mainly as waiters, cashiers, salespersons, clerical assistants or unskilled labourers on a part-time basis for wages ranging from RM 100 to RM 300 a month.

There are others who believe that the dramatic rate of employment among secondary school students during the recent years apparently is not the result of economic hardship but of a greater emphasis on consumerism, commercialism and an increased desire by youths to enjoy the associated benefits of money earned by working (Greenberger & Steinberg, 1986). Today, many commercials and advertisements in magazines, popular
television shows or radio stations are targeted on teenagers' expenditures. The cultivation of adolescents as consumers has played an important role in shaping their leisure taste and interest (Steinberg, 1993). The so-called "youth culture" which young people developed includes a wide range of interests and leisure activities such as going to the cinema, travelling, having parties, eating out, roller-skating, enjoying popular music, dancing and playing video games. These modern and expensive lifestyles are believed to have drawn many adolescents into the part-time labour force (Steinberg, 1993). The culture also creates "necessities", such as personal stereo, branded clothing and sneakers, which few of them can afford without taking on an after-school job.

Whether working part-time is out of real economic need or to gain extra pocket money for their own use, the fact remains that part-time employment has become a popular trend among school adolescents. Many of them are said to make working, not schooling, their priority.

Parents seem to express approval of their children working part-time. Research studies have revealed that most parents believe working while in school promotes independence, self-esteem, greater responsibility and better work habits (Greenberger & Steinberg, 1986; Marsh, 1991; Mortimer & Shanahan, 1994). They also believe that working while in school leads to a greater appreciation of the value of education, better-time management,
and thus better grades (Phillips & Sandstrom, 1990).

However, what parents believe to be true and what actually is true may not necessarily be the same thing. Many studies of part-time employment of school children have shown to be related with a number of problems. These include lower academic achievement and lower school involvement (Barton, 1989; Damico, 1984; Steinberg & Greenberger, 1982), greater psychological distress and somatic complaints (Greenberger, Steinberg & Vaux, 1981; Steinberg & Dornbusch, 1991), higher rates of drug and alcohol use (Bachman & Schulenberg, 1991; Greenberger, Steinberg, & Vaux, 1981; Steinberg & Dornbush, 1991; Steinberg, Greenberger, Garduque, Ruggiero, & Vaux, 1982) and more frequent delinquency (Elliot & Wofford, 1991; Ruggiero, 1984; Steinberg & Dornbusch, 1991).

The effects of part-time employment may vary according to the type of students who work and the number of hours of employment. Working while studying definitely is not an easy task for school students, especially in a society like ours in which education is very examination oriented. Hours spent in working are hours not available for studying or doing homework. Students with better academic skills are probably able to cope with school and part-time work. But, weaker students engaging themselves in part-time work will probably jeopardise their academic achievement, due to reduced time for schoolwork.
Older students are believed to be less influenced by negative elements in workplace than younger students. Research findings however do not support this assumption. For example, Steinberg, Greenberger, Garduque, Ruggiero and Vaux (1982) observed older students smoked cigarette and used marijuana more than the younger ones, particularly as they spent longer time on the job.

Most researchers agree that the negative correlates of employment are linked to the number of hours students work, rather than whether they work (Damico, 1984; Greenberger & Steinberg, 1986; Mortimer & Finch, 1986; Steinberg & Dornbush, 1991). Many of them believe that working more than twenty hours a week may jeopardise adolescents' schooling and psychological well-being. Youngsters who work long hours are absent from school more often, are less likely to participate in extra-curricular activities, reported enjoying school less, spend less time on their homework, and earn lower grades (Damico, 1984; Steinberg, Greenberger, Garduque, Ruggiero, & Vaux, 1982; Steinberg & Dornbush, 1991). Students who work long hours may also miss out on family activities, such as eating dinner together or spending time together on weekends (Greenberger, Steinberg, Vaux & McAuliffe, 1980). Young people who spend more time at work reported growing more distant from their parents and friends and being monitored less closely by their parents (Steinberg & Dornbush, 1991; Steinberg, Greenberger, Garduque, Ruggiero & Vaux, 1982). Working long hours is
also associated with higher rates of alcohol, marijuana, cocaine and cigarette use (Greenberger, Steinberg & Vaux, 1981; Steinberg & Dornbush, 1991).

Compared to the American's school curriculum, the Malaysian school curriculum is more academically oriented and places greater emphasis on examination results. Owing to the fact Malaysian students spend a greater part of their after-school hours at activities related to schoolwork, the amount of time left for engaging in other activities is reduced. If they too spend as many hours as the American students in part-time employment, effects on their achievement and psychological well being will probably be more adverse. In view of that, information regarding the effects of part-time employment on Malaysian students has become crucial.

1.2 Objective of the Study

In Malaysia, relatively few studies have researched into the part-time employment of school students. In view of the current trend of working part-time among students, especially in urban areas, a better understanding of the situation and the influence of part-time employment need to be investigated. In this study, one of the main objectives is to determine the effects of part-time work on adolescents' academic achievement.
In addition, this study will investigate the reasons for working part-time and the extent to which students are involved in part-time employment and its relation to age, gender and social economic status.

This study will also look into the types of part-time job engaged by the students of the selected school and some of the characteristics of the job, such as the number of hours spent on working and the amount of payment the student workers received.

Holding a job is said to facilitate the development of personal responsibility. Managing one's money is an important responsibility or indication of one's ability to be responsible for oneself. In view of this quality of students' employment, the study will also investigate the student workers' ability to manage their earned incomes in terms of budgeting, saving and using them.

Steinberg et al., (1982) in their studies, had suggested that working will lead to increase in certain deviance such as cigarette smoking and use of drugs, unexcused absences, tardiness and lying about completion of school work. In view of the worsening discipline problems in Malaysian schools, the relationship between part-time employment and behavioural problems will also be examined.
1.3 Statement of the Problem

This study is an exploratory study of part-time employment of students in an urban secondary school of Kuala Lumpur. The study hopes to probe how extensive is employment among students in a school, the reasons students work, the type of jobs engaged, the characteristics of jobs such as monthly income and working hours as well as the effects of part-time employment on students' academic achievement and their social behaviour.

Specifically, the study is to answer the following research questions:

(1) What is the percentage of students working part-time in the school selected?

(2) What is the percentage of students working part-time according to:
   a). grade level;
   b). gender;
   c). social economic status ?

(3) What are the types of part-time employment engaged by the student workers?

(4) What is the average work hour per week?
(5) What is the average monthly income of the student-workers?

(6) What are the students' reasons for engaging in part-time work?

(7) Is there a significant difference in academic achievement between student workers and non-student workers?

(8) Is there more deviant behaviour among student workers than non-workers?

(9) What are the ways student workers spend their earned income?

(10) What proportion of the income students estimated to have spent in each of the ways?

1.4 Operational Definitions

Part-time Employment is defined as permanent/temporary paid employment that is occupying or using only part of the normal working week. The terms 'work' and 'employment' are used interchangeably in this study to mean part-time employment.
Season of Employment refers to the period of the year in which work is performed. It is categorised into (a) working during school year and (b) working during school holidays.

Social Economic Status (SES) is based on father's occupation of the student. If the father is deceased or unemployed, the term 'SES' refers to the occupation of the mother or guardian. The subjects are categorised into high, average and low SES groups based on the criteria stated in Appendix I.

Student Workers are students who work part-time and sometimes they are referred to as workers.

Non-Student Workers are students who do not work part-time and sometimes they are referred to as non-workers.

Monthly Income is the estimated amount of money or estimated income students received per month from their part-time work. This is categorised into: (a) less than RM 100 (b) RM100 - RM199, (c) RM200 - RM299 and (d) RM300 and more.

Work Hours Per Week is the estimated number of hours students worked per week. This is categorised into: (a) less than 5 hours, (b) 5 to 14 hours,
(c) 15 to 20 hours and (d) more than 20 hours.

**Academic Achievement** refers to the student's achievement in the school final examination in 1997. The score is the average mark of the total scores in all subjects obtained by the student in the examination. The students are then categorised into: (a) 'low achievers' (the bottom 25% of the whole sample with a mean score of 38.5 or less. (b) 'high achievers' (the top 25% of the whole sample) with a mean score of 71.8 and above). (c) 'moderate achievers' (subjects not included in either of the two groups).

**Deviant Behaviour** refers to behaviour that is judged unacceptable by the school administration. The five types of deviant behaviour studied are:-

a). Cigarette smoking
b). Drinking alcohol
c). Drug use
d). Truancy (from school/class)
e). Skipping school co-curriculum activities

1.5 **Significance of the Study**

If the findings show that the percentage of involvement of students in part-time employment is high, then the school authority should take appropriate measures to check the situation so that students' working will not
affect their school performance.

The reasons cited by students for working part-time may give the school a better understanding of the role it plays in the adolescents' lives. The students could have taken up part-time jobs due to economic necessity or they could have just wished to gain some extra pocket money for personal spending.

By knowing the type and nature of job involved, school counsellors may gain a better understanding of the influences the job poses on the student workers, hence be able to evaluate on the cost and benefit incurred.

If the findings indicate that there is a significant relationship between working part-time and academic achievement, the implication is that students' working hours should be regulated so that it will not jeopardise their school performance.

Finally, since there is a lack of literature on the study of part-time employment of students in Malaysia, it is hoped that the findings of the present study will contribute to the existing meagre knowledge in this area.
1.6 Limitations of the Study

There are a number of important limitations inherent in the present study that needs to be acknowledged.

Firstly, the subjects of the study were drawn from a school with majority of the students from middle class families. Its findings, therefore, cannot be generalised to other schools with different socio-economic background.

Secondly, as the study is exploratory in nature, there are limitations in terms of instrument and methodology used.

Thirdly, the data came solely from students' self-reports. There is the potential danger that the data collected could be biased and lack reliability.

Finally, due to time constraint, the study was based solely on the most recent part-time jobs of the student-workers. The oversimplification of the data may affect the accuracy in the findings to a certain degree.