

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

7.1 Introduction

In this chapter, a summary of the main findings and their implications are presented, together with some suggestions. The suggestions may be considered by those concerned with a need to improve pupils academic achievement in Tamil schools in general and in the PTSSR in particular.

The primary aim of this study was to identify factors which influenced the academic achievement of Standard VI pupils of the National-Type Primary Tamil School, Sungai Renggam (PTSSR) in the Petaling District of Selangor Darul Ehsan. It was also to establish the relationship between these factors and the academic achievement of a sample of primary pupils in the UPSR examination, 1991.

For the purpose of this study, academic achievement has been defined as pupils' performance in Six UPSR papers (Bahasa Malaysia (Comprehension) , Bahasa Malaysia (Composition) , Tamil (Comprehension) , Tamil (Composition), English Language, and Mathematics) and the aggregate scores attained in these six papers.

7.2 Pupil Factors

In this study, sex, SES, intelligence quotient, kindergarten education, frequency of being absent from school, self-perception of ability in class, tuition and pupils' academic and occupational aspirations are considered as pupil factors.

The girls performed better than the boys in all the subjects, except in Mathematics. However, there is no significant relationship between overall academic achievement and the sex of pupils.

It has also been found that there is a significant and positive relationship between fathers' educational level and the academic achievement of pupils in

the UPSR subjects. The pupils with high IQ scores had better results in the UPSR subjects than those with a low IQ.

The data does not support the view that pupils who attend kindergarten generally perform better than those without kindergarten education at the primary level. Kindergarten education was found to be insignificant as a factor influencing the school performance of pupils.

It is not surprising that frequency of absence from school is associated with academic achievement. Frequency of absence is associated with the poor performance of pupils in Bahasa Malaysia (Comprehension), Bahasa Malaysia (Composition), English Language and Mathematics. However, the rate of absenteeism is not significantly related with performance in Tamil (Comprehension) and Tamil (Composition) papers.

The cross-tabulation of self-perception of ability in class by pupils' academic achievement in the

six UPSR papers shows that there is a positive relationship between the two variables. Thus, self-perception is an important factor that influences the academic performance of the PTSSR pupils.

There is a significant relationship between pupils who attend tuition classes and their level of achievement in UPSR subjects. It appears that tuition can enhance the academic achievement of the PTSSR pupils.

In this case study, pupils' academic aspiration was found to be a strong predictor of academic achievement. Pupils' academic aspiration was significant for all six UPSR papers.

As with occupational aspirations, pupils who have high occupational aspirations have performed well in all the UPSR subjects. All the pupils who have high job aspirations did well in the six UPSR papers.

7.3 School Factors

In this study, a number of school factors influencing the academic achievement are considered, namely, teachers' professional and academic qualifications, teachers' experience, workload of teachers, and classroom instruction. As the data collected are qualitative in nature, it is not possible to indicate the extent to which these factors are significant. However, an effort is made to describe the influence of school factors in pupils' academic achievement.

Fairly typical of the kind of teachers who are sent to Tamil primary schools, the teaching staff of PTSSR are relatively young and inexperienced. Furthermore, about a third of the teachers have not received any professional training. As a result, the teachers have voiced their lack of confidence in coping with classroom instruction to pupils whose background is low in socio-economic status. Difficulties in enhancing pupil achievement is further exacerbated by the fact that teachers consider their workload to be heavy in terms of hours and responsibilities.

Based on classroom observation it was noted that the choice of contents, audio-visual aids and sequencing of lessons was ineffective. Furthermore, the use of traditional 'chalk and talk' method for most lessons observed hardly stimulated the interest of the pupils. Equally ineffective was the mode of questioning adopted by the teachers.

On the whole, the quality of instruction needs to be improved. During the course of the interviews, the teachers indicated that they had hardly any opportunities to upgrade their knowledge and experience through in-service training. Poor physical and financial resources hindered further the creation of a conducive school climate to enhance pupil performance.

In spite of the shortcomings in pupil and school factors selected for this case study, it becomes more unexpected that the PTSSR pupils have performed better than their counterparts at the national level. An awareness of the up-hill climb in the ladder of academic achievement by the headmaster, and some of the teachers and pupils may have spurred them on to greater efforts. However, the achievement of PTSSR has yet a

long way to go to be on par with that of the national primary schools (Malay medium) and the national-type primary schools (Chinese medium).

7.4 Parental Factors

In this study, a number of independent variables pertaining to the home and their effect on academic achievement have been analysed. These independent variables are categorised as parental factors relating to parental praise for educational success, encouragement to the child to work hard, parents knowledge of pupils' progress, parents' reaction to child's performance in school, parents' attention to child's learning difficulties and parents' educational and occupational aspirations for the child. Besides quantitative data, qualitative data was obtained by means of interviews with selected parents.

Parental praise and rewards are significantly associated with academic achievement of the PTSSR pupils in all UPSR subjects. Of the pupil respondents who received rewards or prizes, more than 52% are from

the high and medium achievers. From the interviews with the parents, it was shown that most of them are unaware of the importance of praise in encouraging good school performance.

The children who had the help and guidance of their parents performed better than those without such assistance. The findings indicate that parental help in alleviating a child's learning difficulties is significant for all the UPSR subjects.

Both the educational and occupational aspirations of parents for their children are significantly related to achievement in the UPSR subjects. Children who performed well in the UPSR had parents with high educational and occupational aspiration for them.

7.5 Suggestions

The study has indentified some variables within pupil, school and parental factors which are important for the academic achievement of Standard VI pupils of PTSSR in the UPSR of 1991. It remains to highlight and

make suggestions for the consideration of those concerned.

7.5.1. Pupils

Based on the responses from the headmaster, teachers and pupils, and classroom observation, children in the PTSSR have yet to acquire effective learning skills. Some of the skills which will contribute to effective learning practices are :

- (a) Study skills relating to reading and understanding, and taking of notes which will improve a learner's comprehension of materials and teacher presentation
- (b) Thinking skills like the ability to compare and contrast which permit accurate and efficient processing of information
- (c) Problem solving in which a learner identifies issues and develop means of resolving them.

Specifically, the performance of the PTSSR's pupils in the composition papers in Tamil and Bahasa Mlaysia have been far from satisfactory. The weakness of pupils in composition-writing have to be ascertained through content analysis of their written efforts. Once the weakness, whether they are related to the acquisition, organising, elaboration and communicaton of ideas, have been identified, remedial work will have to be initiated.

Co-operative learning is yet another strategy to improve the performance of low achievers. As indicated by Slavin (1991), co-operative learning requires pupils to work in mixed ability groups of four to six members each. the groups are rewarded according to how much the members have learnt. When groups rather than individuals are rewarded, pupils will be motivated to help one another in achieving higher scores.

A positive attitude towards school as well as high self-perception of academic standing are associated with educational performance in national examinations such as the UPSR. Continuous efforts should be

made to nurture and encourage the development of positive attitudes towards school and self.

7.5.2 School

The attitude and management style of the headmaster is critical to the success or otherwise of attempts to develop policies and practices in the school. The headmaster needs to show by word and deed that he is committed to the venture and is prepared to take decisions that indicate that it is an area of priority. Particularly important is the way in which time is managed, resources allocated and personal support and encouragement given to individuals who are expected to take a key role in the school system (Ainscow and Muncey, 1988).

Schools that are successful in meeting the needs of children are also good at meeting the special needs of staff. An atmosphere of collaboration, sharing and support provides strength to staff and in turn, leads them to create a similar ethos in their classrooms (Ainscow and Muncey, 1988). If the school wishes to

improve its work in supporting pupils, it should start by improving its procedures for providing support to individual members of the staff.

Unless there is some form of successful self or externally motivated intervention at a relatively early stage, teacher stress can lead to anxiety which, in turn, can lead to illness. Broadly, two approaches are possible to overcome the problem. One is to implement measures which will reduce the number of stressful situations that arise or to develop coping strategies so that teachers can become better able to deal with the harmful effects of stress (Kyriacou, 1992). Personnel resources is probably the most likely form of response to the feeling of stress. It involves teachers who will resolve their own problems either in terms of learning how to cope or by adopting improved professional skills. Such skills can be facilitated by the school management when in-service training is provided.

4. To improve the classroom skills of teachers, school administrators should organize teacher-development programmes. The aim of such programmes is to help to increase teachers' immediate effectiveness, and to

help them to become lifelong learners. The programmes should include the following aspects as important course contents:

- . Improving the learning process
- . Motivation
- . Questioning techniques
- . Cognitive strategies
- . Coping with stress
- . Reflection and evaluation

5. The school authority may be instrumental in the setting up of a more dynamic Parent-Teacher Association. The aim is the development of an effective system of communication and interaction between the parents and the teachers in finding ways of helping and supporting the learning activities of the pupils. Through a two-way communication between parents and teachers, parents who want to help their children but do not know how may be guided to do so (Mann and Others, 1987).

A community project involving parents and others may be initiated to help children who are disadvantaged. These volunteers may help the poor performers by providing encouragement and resources for learning.

This research reveals motivation by parents to be an important variable. Based on interviews with parents, it is obvious that they are not aware of the importance of this variable. Hence, the school authorities, with PTA support, should organise exposure programmes to increase the awareness of parents to their significant contribution to academic achievement.

7.5.3 Parents

It is generally believed that children's achievement in primary school is enhanced if the parents have realistic expectations and a positive attitude towards education, and encourage and support their children's educational progress. For this purpose, parents require knowledge about schooling and the primary education of their children. Programmes should be planned and organized by the school authority and the PTA on a regular basis. The programmes should focus on informing and sensitizing the parents to their children's education, the processes involved in it, the parental roles in aiding and sustaining the children's interest in education, and the overall improvement in

the quality of support which the children receive from their parents (Comber and Hancock, 1987 and Wolfendale, 1989).

School personnel often complain that parents are inaccessible and not interested in the needs and problems of the schools. School staff need to persist and develop a variety of strategies to involve reluctant parents in school activities. The following suggestions are given to aid those who will be working with parents (Mann P.H and others, 1987, Wolf, 1989 and Epstein, 1991).

(a) Parents who can attract other parents should be made use of. An effort need to be made to locate the people in the community who can induce others to participate effectively.

(b) Parents can be enticed to be in school through the effort of their children. If the child is 'on stage' at the right time and transportation is available, someone in the family is likely to turn up in school.

of their own home, parents are more likely to talk about concerns they might have with supporting their child's learning due to problems of health, unemployment, poverty, overcrowding or the parents' own level of literacy. The home-school liaison teacher may be able to suggest or establish links with appropriate agencies to help with particular problems. The purpose of involving parents through contact is to encourage support rather than apportion blame for poor progress made.

The enhancement of academic performance of PTSSR requires the co-operation of different clientele of the school system, namely, the headmaster, teachers, pupils and parents. Each and everyone needs to work towards the common goal of enhancing individuals performance in academic as well as non-academic pursuits.

Outside the school system, the PTSSR needs support of the District Education Office, the State Education Department and the Ministry itself. Disadvantaged schools such as the PTSSR require the attention of educational authorities in the way of providing better physical facilities, financial resources and

opportunities for teachers to improve themselves academically and professionally through pre-service and in-service training.

7.6 Limitation of the Study

This is an exploratory study of factors influencing the academic achievement of Standard VI pupils in the PTSSR. Being exploratory in nature and limited in sample, the findings cannot be generalised to other Tamil primary schools.

The preference for an in-depth study prompted the exclusion of some variables which may influence the sample pupils. Examples are objectives of schooling, school climate and the state of health of pupils concerned.

Data collected from the headmaster, teachers, pupils and parents are at one point of time in 1991. This suggests a longitudinal study rather than a cross-sectional one which will allow for the tracing of achievement over a period of time.

The study concentrates on academic achievement of Standard VI pupils in the PTSSR. Non-academic pursuits such as co-curricular activities and character building, and their relationship with academic achievement have not been examined in a meaningful manner in this case study.

7.7 Directions for Further Research

This study has been rather exploratory in nature. A more in-depth study could have been made of the attributes that are manifested by pupils, teachers and parents.

Another area for closer attention would be the self-perception and motivation of pupils, and academic achievement.

In considering the 'what' and 'how' of effective teaching, a number of areas could be explored further:

- (a) studies based on teachers' and pupils' opinion regarding effective teaching

- (b) studies based on classroom observation by an outside observer (using either schedules, rating scales or participant observation technique).

Another area that merits attention is the nature of learning within the context of effective teaching.

A longitudinal study which employs several of the significant influences in the academic achievement of the pupils can be carried out. This kind of study will lend itself to a comparative study over a period of about five years.

7.8 Conclusion

In spite of limitations indicated, the study has raised several important issues and many pertinent questions that merit the attention and consideration of individuals concerned. There is a need to examine objectively what is happening at home and in school so that pupil performance is enhanced. Information so generated can be used to enhance the welfare of clients served, given that the future of the pupils, is to a large extent, in the hands of schools, district, state and national administrators.