Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

This study is concerned with the television viewing of Form I and Form IV students. Television viewing has been blamed for a host of problems, ranging from declining academic achievement scores to societal ills such as aggression and erosion of moral values. Although studies on the effects of television especially on adolescents are inconclusive, television viewing as the most time-consuming leisure activity of adolescents is well established.

1.1 General Area of Concern

Child development research recognises the importance of environmental contexts for children’s development. The major contexts for children’s development are family, peers and schooling. Another highly influential development context is the media, especially television. The television set has become an intrinsic feature of virtually every household.
Since its introduction to the public in the 1950s, television has proved to be one of the most prevalent and influential innovations of this century. Television sets are now found in almost every home. Most families have more than one set. New video technologies have brought video cassette recorders, video discs, cable television and satellite television channels into the homes of viewers.

Some basic facts about television will emphasise the pervasiveness of this medium and the magnitude of its influence in the lives of children and adults. According to the national commercial television rating services, the average American child between two and eighteen years of age watches over three hours of television a day (Anderson and Collins, 1988). It has been estimated that by the time a child finishes high school, he will have spent 18 000 hours in front of the television set and only 12 000 hours in the classroom (Moody, 1980, p. 5). Considering the time spent watching television during weekends and school holidays, children spend more time watching television than they do in any other waking activity. Watching television is the most common and time-consuming leisure activity of children and adolescents (Schramm, Lyle and Parker, 1961).
Closer to home, a recent survey on television viewing habits of teenagers carried out by a Malaysian newspaper reported an average of 3.2 hours of television viewing per weekday and 6.2 hours daily on weekends (Alina, Alina and Chow, 1995). Those with televisions or video cassette recorders in their rooms spent, on an average, 4.2 hours per weekday and 7.8 hours daily on weekends watching television. This means that teenagers spent as much time in front of the television set as they did in school! The number of viewing hours reported in the English daily may not be accurate estimates but the results of the survey indicate that nowadays, the amount of viewing has increased tremendously over the years and adolescents are watching a great deal of television. The amount of viewing of Malaysian children is probably comparable to that of children in developed countries.

Earlier studies in Malaysia found that viewers watched less than ten hours of television per week (Hui, 1981; Sarjit, 1973). In the 1970s, only two channels were in use (Karthigesu, 1994; Nair, 1990). The combined transmission hours of these two channels did not exceed 90 hours per week. The increase in television viewing is probably related to greater accessibility, not only in terms of longer broadcasting hours but also in increased number of channels.
Television Malaysia was inaugurated on December 28 1963 with one network operating from Kuala Lumpur (Karthigesu, 1994). A second channel was added on November 17 1969. These two government-owned networks are now known as TV1 and TV2. Colour television was introduced in 1978. In the 1980s, video cassette recorders (VCRs) began to gain popularity in Malaysia. Viewers turned to the VCR as it gave them a wider choice of movies, drama serials and other entertainment programmes. TV3, a private station, was launched in 1984 to meet the increasing demand for entertainment programmes. The country's second private television network, MetroVision, began transmission on July 1 1995 ("MetroVision Channel", 1995) in the Klang Valley. In the third quarter of 1995, Mega TV, Malaysia's first subscription television commenced operation with five channels to provide round-the-clock programmes ("Pay TV", 1995).

The country is now on the threshold of a new age of television following the launching of the Malaysia East Asia Satellite or MEASAT ("Provide Alternative Fare", 1995). Satellite broadcaster Astro launched 22 satellite television channels in October 1996. The
number of television channels will keep on increasing to offer viewers an infinite variety of programmes for 24 hours daily.

The past three decades saw a rapid increase not only in the number of television channels but also in transmission hours. In 1970, the two existing television channels provided a total of 84 transmission hours per week (Nair, 1990). This increased to 107 hours per week in 1980. Transmission began in the evenings and ended by midnight.

Nowadays, TV1 broadcasts programmes from 6 am to 1 am while TV2 begins transmission at 1 pm from Mondays to Thursdays and at 6 am to 2 am on Fridays and weekends. MetroVision begins transmission at 2 pm and ends transmission at 1 am on weekdays and 2 am on weekends. Since September 1 1997, TV3 has been providing round-the-clock television transmission. This means that school children are able to find interesting programmes 24 hours a day, every day of the week.

In view of the easy availability of television, the increasing number of television channels, programmes and transmission hours, there is an urgent need to investigate children's viewing hours, television habits and its influence on their lives. Television may
displace homework, reading and studying which are beneficial to students' academic achievement. Many studies have found a negative association between amount of television viewing and academic achievement (Furu, 1971; Gaddy, 1986; Hornik, 1978; Hornik, 1981; Morgan and Gross, 1980).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

One important characteristic which distinguishes television behaviour from other media-behaviour is "consumption of time" (Furu, 1971, p.29). Research evidence indicates that children's viewing hours can be quite substantial. With the increasing number of television channels and longer transmission hours, it is difficult for children to control their viewing time. It is therefore important to investigate the amount of television that adolescents watch.

Children in the range of ten to fourteen years of age have been found to watch the most television. Children in later teens watch less television (reviewed in Hendry and Patrick, 1977; Liebert and Sprafkin, 1988). This study will compare the viewing hours of two age groups, namely the 13- to 14-year-olds who are in the peak viewing age and the 16- to 17-year-olds who reportedly watch less television.
Previous studies (Francis and Gibson, 1993; Hendry and Patrick, 1977; Himmelweit, Oppenheim and Vince, 1958; Schramm, Lyle and Parker, 1962; Ward, Mead and Searls, 1983) have made comparisons between heavy viewers and light viewers to look for factors which are useful in predicting amount of viewing. Some of the factors which have been found to influence amount of viewing are gender and socio-economic status.

Studies in Japan have consistently found boys' viewing time to be longer than girls', presumably because of the difference in role expectations of boys and girls. Girls were expected to help with household chores whereas boys had fewer restrictions on their viewing time (Furu, 1971). Surveys in the United States and Britain, however, reported little difference between boys and girls in the amount of television viewing (Himmelweit et al., 1958; Schramm et al., 1962). More recent studies have not been consistent (Francis and Gibson, 1993; Ward et al., 1983). Therefore this study aims to investigate the influence of gender on the amount of viewing among Malaysian adolescents.

Studies in the 1950s found socio-economic background to be of little importance in affecting children's viewing time. It was thought
that the introduction of television was too recent then for the use of television to become associated with social class (Himmelweit et al., 1958). Later studies have generally found children from low socio-economic status (SES) families to watch more television than children from high SES families (Fetler, 1984; Francis and Gibson, 1993). This study will also attempt to examine the relationship between amount of viewing and SES.

Since children spend so much time watching television, it must have a major impact on their lives. One of the earliest studies on the introduction of television looked at the displacement effects of television viewing. Displacement effects refer to the reduction of time spent on other activities because of time taken up by television viewing (Himmelweit et al., 1958). For example, many studies of the influence of television on academic performance posit a displacement mechanism. Television viewing is said to displace activities which are presumed to be beneficial to academic performance such as homework, reading or studying. It has been hypothesised that the more television children watch, the less time they will have for these activities.
The majority of previous studies have found a negative association between amount of viewing and academic achievement (Furu, 1971; Gaddy, 1986; Hornik, 1978; Morgan and Gross, 1980). As heavy viewers with lower academic achievement are also likely to be from low SES homes and SES correlates with both achievement and television viewing, the negative association between amount of viewing and academic achievement may be a spurious one. A few studies have shown that the negative association became smaller and nonsignificant when control variables were introduced (Childers and Ross, 1973; Thompson, 1964). Other studies have shown that the negative association between television viewing hours and academic achievement is not a spurious one (Hornik, 1978; Morgan and Gross, 1980). The negative association appeared to be the strongest for children at higher grade levels and for children from high SES families (Morgan and Gross, 1980; California State Department of Education, 1980). This study will examine the relationship between amount of viewing and academic achievement when SES is controlled.

Previous research (Himmelweit et al., 1958) has looked at the relationship between amount of viewing and homework time. Findings have not been consistent. However, a synthesis of 3000 educational
productivity studies found that homework has a strong and significant relationship with academic performance (Walberg, 1984). In view of the strong relationship between academic achievement and homework, it is important to investigate the relationship between amount of viewing and time spent on homework. In addition, the percentage of adolescents who watch television while doing their homework and those who go to school with unfinished homework should be investigated to obtain a better understanding of the relationship between school performance and television viewing.

Although the emphasis of this study is on amount of television viewing, television behaviour, particularly in terms of programme preference of adolescents, will also be investigated. Age, gender, SES and academic achievement level which affect amount of viewing have also been found to affect programme preference (Hendry and Patrick, 1978; Himmelweit et al., 1958; Francis and Gibson, 1993). This study will investigate the programme preference of adolescents and its relationship with grade level, gender, SES and academic achievement.

Previous research has shown that few parents set definite rules or regulations on the use of television in the home (Steiner, 1963). This study will investigate the extent of parental control over the
television viewing of adolescents as well as the types of rules that parents set on television viewing.

1.3 Research Questions

This study is designed to answer the following questions:

1. How many hours of television do Form I and Form IV students watch per week?

2. Are there significant differences in amount of television viewing between
   (a) Form I and Form IV students;
   (b) boys and girls;
   (c) low, middle and high SES students; and
   (d) low, moderate and high achievers?

3. Is amount of television viewing and academic achievement related when SES is controlled?

4. Are there significant differences among light, moderate and heavy viewers in
   (a) homework time;
   (b) watching television while doing homework; and
   (c) going to school with unfinished homework?
5. How is television viewing time distributed?

6. Are there significant differences in programme preference between
   (a) Form I and Form IV students;
   (b) boys and girls;
   (c) low, middle and high SES students; and
   (d) low, moderate and high achievers?

7. What is the extent of parental control over the students’ television viewing?

1.4 Definition of Terms

Amount of Television Viewing

It is the total number of television viewing hours (rounded to the nearest hour) per week. Television viewing includes viewing of video tapes and laser discs.

Viewers are classified into light, moderate and heavy viewers. The categorisation of viewers is based on the classification by Hendry and Patrick (1977) and Medrich (1979). In these studies, light viewers watched one and a half hours or less, moderate viewers watched two to three hours and the heavy viewers watched three to four hours or more per day. Instead of categorising according to
number of viewing hours per day, the categorisation in this study is based on number of viewing hours per week.

**Light viewers** are those who watch 10 hours or less in a week.

**Moderate viewers** are those who watch 11 to 24 hours of television in a week.

**Heavy viewers** are those who watch more than 24 hours of television in a week.

**Socio-economic Status**

Subjects are categorised into low, middle or high SES groups according to the status of the father’s occupation. The father’s occupational status only is used although the SES index is often measured by parental education, occupational prestige or income, or a combination of these factors (Chiam, 1972; Leong, 1990; Sarjit, 1973).

**Low SES** - father’s occupation in the manual labour group, for example, cooks, hawkers and odd-job workers.

**Middle SES** - father’s occupation in the sub-professional group, for example, clerks, technicians and typists.

**High SES** - father’s occupation in the professional or managerial group, for example, doctors, lawyers and managers.
A comprehensive list of occupations in each SES group is given in Appendix B.

Academic Achievement

Academic achievement is defined as the aggregate grade points for all subjects in the national examination or school examination.

(a) Form I:

(i) Achievement in terms of the *Ujian Pencapaian Sekolah Rendah* (Primary School Achievement Test) is the aggregate grade points of four subjects in the *UPSR*, with scores ranging from 4 (lowest academic achievement) to 20 (highest academic achievement).

(ii) Achievement in terms of school examination is the aggregate grade points of seven subjects in the most recent school examination, with scores ranging from 7 to 35.

(b) Form IV:

(i) Achievement in terms of the *Penilaian Menengah Rendah* (Lower Secondary Assessment) is the aggregate grade points of seven subjects in the *PMR*, with scores ranging from 7 to 35.
(ii) Achievement in terms of school examination is the aggregate grade points of nine subjects in the most recent school examination, with scores ranging from 9 to 81.

On the basis of achievement, the subjects were divided into three almost equal groups comprising:

**Low achievers** - subjects who are at the bottom one-third of the achievement scores distribution.

**Moderate achievers** - subjects who are at the middle one-third of the achievement scores distribution.

**High achievers** - subjects who are at the top one-third of the achievement scores distribution.

**Programme Preference**

Refers to the most favoured television programmes which are categorised into cartoon, comedy, documentary, drama, movie, music, quiz or game show, serials and sports.

**Parental control**

Refers to the setting of definite rules and regulations on the use of the television at home which are categorised as: (i) parents set definite rules, (ii) set rules only during examinations, (iii) no rules most of the time and (iv) no rules at all.