Chapter 5
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this final chapter, a discussion of the results and implications of the findings is presented. This is followed by a discussion of the limitations of this study and recommendations for further research.

5.1 Discussion

The viewing hours means of Form I and Form IV students were 19.1 hours and 17.2 hours per week respectively. As the viewing hours included weekend viewing, the viewing hours mean per weekday was only between 2.1 and 2.2 hours. The findings refute the commonly held belief of parents and teachers that adolescents spend a great number of their after-school hours in front of the television set.

School children need relaxation daily and the two hours of television viewing may help them to relax. On the one hand, the length of daily viewing among school children seems reasonable but on the other, it is also quite high as school children do not have very much free time during weekdays. Many of them attend tuition classes and
have to complete homework and assignments given by their schoolteachers as well as tutors, leaving students with little time for leisure activities on week days.

Although the average viewing hours were not excessive, the range of scores reveal great variability. The range indicates there were students who did not watch television at all or watched very little to those who watched sixty hours a week. The percentages of students who watched four and a half hours or more of television daily were 15 per cent of the Form I students and 11 per cent of the Form IV students. This finding indicates that these children were addicted to television viewing and had little time for other activities such as completing homework and reading. On weekdays, heavy viewers watched television for more than half the time available between school dismissal time and bedtime. It is surmised that heavy viewers are unlikely to participate actively in school clubs or spend much time with their peers in social activities.

In spite of the relatively low television viewing hours means, the majority of students watched television almost daily. More than 80 per cent of the students watched prime time television on four or more weekday evenings. This indicates that television viewing is very much
a part of the daily routine of students. The hours between dinner and bedtime are usually spent in front of the television set.

The difference in viewing hours between the Form I students (13- to 14-year-olds) and Form IV students (16- to 17-year-olds) was not significant. Most studies (Francis and Gibson, 1993; Liebert and Sprafkin, 1988; Schramm, Lyle and Parker, 1961; Ward, Mead and Searls, 1983) have found that the 12- to 14-year-olds watched more television than older adolescents. This is due to the older adolescents spending more time with their peers in social activities. It is possible that cultural differences account for the failure to find a significant difference in viewing hours between the Form I and Form IV students in this study. For instance, American adolescents would be dating and spending a lot of time outside their homes, especially during the weekends. Therefore, the older adolescents do not watch as much television as the 12- to 14-year-olds who spend more time at home. In contrast, dating among Malaysian school-going adolescents is frowned upon by most parents.

The amount of viewing between boys and girls was not significantly different. Differences in behaviour between boys and girls are often attributed to the different role expectations. Therefore,
the lack of gender difference in the amount of viewing possibly indicates that parents treated their children equally, irrespective of gender. For instance, both boys and girls have to do household chores or both are not expected to do them.

The surmise that both boys and girls are treated similarly is supported by the finding that differences in parental control between the boys and girls were not significant. Contrary to expectations, girls did not face greater restrictions in television viewing than boys. In actuality, a higher percentage of the girls were not under rules, especially the Form IV girls. It appears that the girls were trusted to monitor their own viewing, presumably because they had a greater sense of responsibility and commitment to their studies.

The difference in the amount of viewing between the SES groups was significant for both grade levels. Generally, the low SES students watched more television than the high SES students. However, a contradiction in the viewing pattern of the Form I and Form IV students from the middle SES families was discovered. For the Form I students, the middle SES students watched the least television whereas for the Form IV students, the middle SES students watched the most.
The finding that high SES students watched the least television could be due to limited free time for television viewing. One possible restriction on their time is tuition. Some students had tuition for most subjects which amounted to a few times a week. In addition, they had to complete not only their school work but also their tuition assignments.

The greater choice of leisure activities available to high SES families could be another explanation for the lower viewing hours. High SES children have the opportunity to participate in sports and recreational activities at clubs whose membership fees are beyond the reach of low and middle SES parents. High SES students also have more pocket-money for activities such as going to the movies with their friends. For low and middle SES students, television viewing is the most accessible form of entertainment.

The extent of parental control on children's television viewing was rather low. Only one third of the Form I students and one fifth of the Form IV students reported that their parents set definite rules on television viewing. The difference in parental control between the two grade levels was significant. As expected, parental control was greater for the younger students. Parents of Form IV students probably felt
that their children were more mature and capable of monitoring their own viewing.

For both grade levels, a higher percentage of low achievers than moderate or high achievers reported that their parents set definite rules on television viewing. Probably, concerned parents, knowing their children were academically weak, restricted their viewing. The finding also suggests that parents regard television as a replacement of homework and school work and as one of the causes for children’s poor achievement.

Parental control has important implications as parents have the power to counteract almost any negative influence of television. As it is difficult to control the viewing of the older adolescents, parents should set definite rules on viewing when their children were young. Children with well-established healthy viewing habits will be disciplined in their viewing even when free of parental control. Adolescents who have acquired the habit of viewing excessively will only be resentful and rebellious when subjected to strict parental control when they are older.

Forty-four per cent and 32 per cent of the Form I and Form IV students respectively watched television after 10 pm on nights
preceding school days. The percentage of students staying up to watch television when the following day was a school day is not healthy. Students who went to bed late would be sleepy and inattentive in the classroom.

One would expect students in the afternoon session to use the mornings for doing homework or participating in the activities of school clubs. Eighteen per cent of the Form I students watched television four mornings or more on Mondays to Fridays before going to school. This implies that this group of students hardly participated in the activities of school clubs. However, the majority of the students hardly watched any television before going to school.

For both grade levels, a negative correlation was found between the amount of viewing and achievement. This means that achievement decreases with increases in viewing hours.

However, the magnitude of the correlation is low, particularly for the Form I students when SES is partialled out. This suggests that SES accounts for the relationship between viewing hours and achievement. Thus, the relationship between achievement and amount of viewing for the Form I students may be a spurious one.
For the Form IV students, partialling out for SES lowers the correlation only slightly. However, the magnitude of the correlation is small, implying that the relationship is weak and of limited practical significance.

More light viewers never watched television while doing homework. In contrast, higher percentages of heavy and moderate viewers occasionally watched television while doing homework. This indicates that the heavy and moderate viewers accommodate their heavier viewing hours by carrying out the two activities simultaneously. Watching television while doing homework can reduce the quality and effectiveness of homework.

For the Form I students, a higher percentage of heavy viewers sometimes went to school with unfinished homework. There are two possible explanations for this finding: the heavy viewers could not complete their homework because of their excessive television viewing or the heavy viewers, being academically weak students, could not complete their homework and hence spent the time watching television. For the Form IV students, a high percentage of all three groups of viewers occasionally went to school without completing their homework.
Form I and Form IV students preferred drama and comedy to factual programmes such as documentaries and discussion programmes which were not popular. The programme preference of viewers indicates that adolescents watch television chiefly for entertainment.

A higher percentage of low SES students preferred movies and Chinese and Malay serials while a higher percentage of middle and high SES students preferred comedy and drama. The low, moderate and high achievers showed the same preference as that of the SES groups.

The differences in favourite programmes between the three SES groups and three levels of achievement may reflect the language proficiency of the different groups. Serials are usually in Chinese and Malay whereas drama and sitcom are mostly in English. It is surmised that higher percentages of low SES students and low achievers were not proficient in English and preferred programmes in their mother tongues.

As low SES students are not likely to receive much parental guidance on selectivity in viewing, schools may have to be the agents of change by teaching students to be selective and plan their television
viewing. In the class, the teacher can initiate discussions on various aspects of television viewing, including the specific television programmes. The Information Ministry and private television stations should carry out content analyses of the programmes aired on television and the effect of these programmes on viewers, particularly children.

5.2 Limitations of Study

The sample of this study comprised students from a suburban secondary school in Petaling Jaya. The majority of the students were from middle and high SES families. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalised to students in rural parts of the country, Sabah and Sarawak and communities which do not have populations similar to that of the school studied. However, the findings provide an insight into the television viewing of students in Form I and Form IV, particularly their viewing hours and programme preferences.

In this study, the time-scale sheet in the questionnaire was used to measure amount of television viewing per week. The time-scale sheet which required subjects to indicate their viewing in a week was administered at one time. This is because it was difficult to obtain
permission from the school administrator to administer the instrument daily for a week. Administration of the instrument daily for a week would have given more accurate and reliable data on the students’ viewing hours. However, daily administration of the instrument has its own weaknesses. For example, subjects who are absent during the week would lower the response rate. Subjects may also tend to watch more television so that they have something to write the following day.

Finally, this study was designed to investigate the relationship of television viewing to grade level, gender, SES and achievement. The findings do not reveal the causal connections underlying the relationships.

5.3 Recommendations for Further Research

Studies on television viewing should be replicated with other populations such as students from smaller towns or the rural areas where leisure activities and exposure to electronic audio-visual facilities may be quite different. Primary school children should be studied as the media behaviour of younger children may differ from that of adolescents.
The variables investigated in this study are just a few of the variables related to television viewing. Further studies need to be carried out using variables such as parental example and students' attitude towards school. Studies on available leisure time of students and their perception of the availability of alternatives to television may reveal the reasons for excessive television viewing.

As more homes subscribe to cable and satellite television, studies to compare viewers from homes with and those without cable-satellite facilities should be carried out. Case studies on homes which choose not to have a television may also reveal interesting insights on family cohesion. More studies on television viewing would add to a fuller understanding of the influence of television in the lives of children.

5.4 Conclusion

The majority of Form I and Form IV students watched reasonable amounts of television. Adolescents' amount of viewing was significantly related to SES. Although the findings refute the commonly held belief that adolescents spend too much time in front of the television set, the number of students who watched excessive
amounts of television is not trivial. It is the excessive viewers that parents and teachers should take note of as heavy viewing probably expresses needs that are not met in these children’s lives.

Parents tended to be lax in controlling their children’s television viewing. These parents, especially parents of the 14-year-olds, expected their children to monitor their own viewing. However, children who watched excessive amounts of television were clearly unable to regulate their own viewing. Parents should inculcate good viewing habits in their children at a young age when they are more receptive to guidance and supervision.

The number of children staying up late to watch television or watching television before going to school was not small. This group of students comprised higher percentages of low SES students and low achievers. This implies that students who were not doing well and least able to afford being inattentive in school, were also less disciplined in their viewing.

All correlations between achievement and viewing hours, though low, are consistently negative. Although television viewing is not the sole factor for students’ poor academic achievement, it can depress achievement.
On the other hand, television can benefit students, if used appropriately. Through television, information and knowledge can be presented effectively and in ways that are easily understood by academically weak students. Low SES children, having fewer resources in the home, can also benefit from television. However, television as a medium for informing and teaching will never be fully realised without changes in the policies of television stations and intervention from parents, schools and the Information Ministry.