Perception and Expectation of Parents and Students Regarding Choice of Secondary School Type

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Abstract: This study was carried out to investigate the perceptions and expectations of parents and students regarding choice of secondary school type. It also identified the influencing factors in shaping the perceptions and expectations of parents and students in choosing the type of secondary school. This quantitative study involved five different types of schools and used a questionnaire distributed to parents and students. Quantitative analysis using Pearson correlation was used in this study to identify whether a significant relationship existed between parents’ and students’ perceptions and expectations in selecting the type of secondary schools.

Key words: Perception, Expectation, Choice of School Type

1. INTRODUCTION

In the Malaysian school system, placement of school students is based on residential address (Sua, Ngah, & Darit, 2013). After pupils complete Standard Six or after they have sat for the primary school assessment (Ujian Peperiksaan Sekolah Rendah, UPSR) public examination, these students will again be placed in schools based on their home address. Nevertheless, when they are about to go into Form One, students are allowed to choose the secondary school of their choice to further their studies based on their UPSR results or their interest. Students are also given another chance to choose their secondary school type after obtaining their form three examination (Pepenksaan Tingkatan Tiga, PT3) results. If the students have many choices of school, this will give a positive impact on the outcomes and accomplishments of each individual (Edmark, Frölich, & Wondratschek, 2014).

In Malaysia, apart from choosing secondary day schools, students also have the opportunity to join various other types of public schools. Parents who can afford the fees have a varied choice of private schooling for their children. Parents have the right to choose the school for the sake of their children’s future (Butler & Hamnett, 2012). This is because education is an important asset in an individual’s life whereby an individual has the right to obtain the best education (Altrichter, Bacher, Beham, Nagy, & Wetzelhüttter, 2011).

The education of children in secondary school is very important for ensuring and preparing children for a more effective educational environment (Neilson & McNally, 2013). The Neilson and McNally study was related to choice of nursing school in Sweden. Their findings showed that while the pupils were in primary school in grade five or six, many of them were interested in choosing nursing as a career. But when they enter secondary school, the majority are more interested in choosing a more prestigious career such as doctor or pharmacist. This is because the influence and encouragement while in secondary school has greater influence on students in determining their direction in achieving their future objectives. This also shows that each individual has the right and freedom to make a choice of school in order to get a perfect and quality education (Goyette,
Parents have high individual perceptions and expectations in making choices of school type (Wang & Eccles, 2013). Parents have and determine the values and high standard in making choices about schools for their children (Butler & Hamnett, 2012). The role of parents is important and in influencing and motivating to enhance achievement and success of their children (Fletcher, Greenwood, & Parkhill, 2010). The perceptions and expectations of parents in making selection of education for their children are also influenced by the demographic characters or background of the parents themselves (Butler & Hamnett, 2012; Edmark et al., 2014; Fletcher et al., 2010).

The study findings show that perceptions and expectations of parents are the main influencers in choice of school type (Wang & Degol, 2013). Parents are inclined to choose schools renowned for excellent academic performance (Popa, 2012; Warren, 2010; Wölfel & Heineck, 2012). According to the study by Sua, Ngah, and Darit (2013), the factors influencing Malay parents to send their children to National Type Chinese Schools are high expectations from the parents. Nevertheless, this study showed that Malay students could not fulfil the expectations of their parents because they faced problems mastering Chinese language.

Students also possess perspectives and expectations in selecting their school type. Having choices of school type is important because it gives an impact on the overall life of the students in the future (Neilson & Mcnally, 2013). Those students who choose schools they like will raise their commitment and engagement in school (Edmark et al., 2014). Subsequently, this can lessen problems in the teaching and learning process in schools. If students are given opportunity to choose the school or field they desire, the outcomes are better and of greater quality (Green, Navarro-Paniagua, Ximénez-de-Embun, & Mancebón, 2014). Today, students like to search for unique schools that can give them new and interesting experiences in their learning process. They choose the school because they have interests, desires, motivations and aspirations of excellence in their chosen fields. They desire schools that can prepare them to become students of quality and provide skills for their future (Ravindran & Kalpana, 2012).

What is clear is that parents and students have their own perceptions and expectations in selecting the school type. Past studies actually give the bigger scope to parents and students in choosing where it involves higher institutions (Wiswall, Stiebel, Schwartz, & Boccardo, 2014). This study will only focus on Form Four secondary school students; it will also be carried out in several different types of secondary schools. The obvious gap is in the lack of studies done simultaneously on parents and students themselves in various types of schools. Hence this study takes into consideration whether a relationship exists between perceptions and expectations of parents and students in choice of the type of secondary school desired.

2. Perceptions of Parents and Students

Cultural Values

Socialization and cultural norms of an individual’s life very much influence and shape their values, culture, beliefs and choices (Babak Alavi & McCormick, 2004).

Family culture will influence children’s academic achievement (Fucci & Cavaletto, 2012; Gibbons, 2009; Goyette, 2008; Wang & Degol, 2013). The outstanding cognitive development of children is shaped by a stimulating home environment (Fucci & Cavaletto, 2012; Gibbons, 2009). Parents and children will design strategies to ensure excellent academic achievement of children (Gibbons, 2009; Fletcher et al., 2010) and prepare children with various skills (Fucci & Cavaletto, 2012). A family environment also influences children in choosing their career (Wang & Degol, 2013).

Nevertheless, there are also parents who want their children to get a better education than they had and who place importance on moral values (Walker & Clark, 2010). In creating quality individuals, there are parents and students who select religious high schools because of their family culture whereby they begin to appreciate the importance of loyalty to their religion (affective domain) (Sahlan, 2014) and place importance on moral values such as discipline and mutual respect (Butler & Hamnett, 2012).
Whatever the choice, the practice of cultural values must be seen from the viewpoint of culture of individualism or collectivism (Babak Alavi & McCormick, 2004). In Asia the collectivist culture is still practised as compared to the West (Siah, Ong, Tan & Sim, 2014; Wang & Degol, 2013).

Nevertheless, some studies show that the family culture does not influence perceptions of parents and students in school selection (Sánchez-Medina, Macías-Gómez-Stern, & Martínez-Lozano, 2014); these studies found that school is the institution where the transition process occurs between varied family culture of students.

School Climate

Over the past two decades, studies have been done on the importance of conducive school climate in excellent achievement of students. School climate can be categorized into three dimensions: physical and school management, socioeducational process encompassing education including school quality and norms and values, interpersonal relationship, and social interaction as well as dimensions of school structure such as school size and curriculum (Brault, Janosz, & Archambault, 2014).

School climate is an important element in selecting a school and field of study because it has a significant relationship with student achievement (Brault et al., 2014; Meristo & Eisenschmidt, 2014; Pecháčková, Navrátilová, & Slavíková, 2014) and impacts on social behavior (Bear, Gaskins, Blank, & Chen, 2011; Mitchell & Bradshaw, 2013). Parental and student perceptions and expectations are high for a school climate that is motivating and positive (Atkins, Johnson, Force, & Petrie, 2015). Factors such as parents, teachers and peers are significant in shaping a good school climate (Atkins et al., 2015; Hardré & Sullivan, 2008; Wang & Eccles, 2013) and shaping effective interpersonal relationships (Atkins et al., 2015; Mitchell & Bradshaw, 2013). Involvement from all educational community members in carrying out their respective responsibilities will help schools focus on student outcomes. This can reduce the discipline problems and social ills among students (Hardré & Sullivan, 2008). Students also will feel safe and secure in school and show positive development from the cognitive, psychomotor and affective aspects (Meristo & Eisenschmidt, 2014; Pecháčková et al., 2014).

Student Interest

Since two decades ago, studies have been done on the interest and efficacy related to choice in the field of education. Student interest in a field influences their choice of education and career (Leung et al., 2014; Paixão, Silva, & Leitão, 2010). The students’ personal interest impacts on and motivates their academic achievement (Chung, Lin, Huang, & Yang, 2013; Patall et al., 2014) and enhances their skills (Vaughn & Witko, 2013). Students’ interest has a significant relationship with their competency (Leung et al., 2014; Mendolia & Walker, 2014; Navas, 2014; Yang & Chang, 2009).

More interesting, the study by Lent, Paixao, Silva, and Leitao (2010) and Leung, Zhou, Ho, Li, and Tracey (2014) using the Holland RIASEC Model shows that interest or preferences of students together with social support (parental perceptions and expectations) have a significant relationship with choice of field of study and career. This finding is the same as that in the study by Mendolia and Walker (2014) using matching method but the difference is that change may occur in the preferences and interests of students in the process of raising achievement in personal education of students.

Nevertheless, the study by Lent, Sheu, Singley, Schmidt, and Gloster (2008) in the United States of America on 209 university students taking engineering found that competency, self capability and output expectations are more significant than individual interest in the choice of education field. Students’ perceptions of their capability and expectations of prestigious career were considered when making career choices.

3. Expectations of Parents and Students

Intellectual Achievements

The choice of school made by students and teachers is based on high expectations of the outcomes and intellectual achievement of students (Byrne et al., 2012; Delaney et al., 2011; Haimerl & Fries, 2010). Parents and students have high expectations about the schools that
show outstanding achievement (Vryonides & Gouvias, 2012).

The expectations in perceptions of excellent intellectual achievement are also related to the culture of and experiences brought by the family (Chen, 2015; Giirses, Kuzey, Mindivan, Dogar, Giines, & Youlcu, 2011; Vryonides & Gouvias, 2012). Students shape their expectations based on the environment and culture absorbed by their parents and families, in other words implicit expectations (Glick & White, 2004).

Expectations in intellectual achievement are also significantly related to the attitude and personality of the individual who is making the selection of education determined by the individual (Delaney et al., 2011; Zou, Anderson, & Tsey, 2013). This is because the outcome is relevant with the expectations determined by the individual (Byrne et al., 2012). This is the impact from individuals who can identify the appropriate field of study suited to their intellectual ability (Walkey, McClure, Meyer, & Weir, 2013).

**Career Aspirations**

According to Gottfredson (1981), the process of choosing a career basically starts with the fantasy of children aged 3-5 years and their career interests are nurtured when they are aged 11-15 years. An individual's career aspirations are actually influenced by various factors, among them family expectations, school environment and social cultural system (Hou & Leung, 2011).

High expectations in academic achievement and exposure to career choice actually is a measure of the extent of parental involvement in children's progress (Attanasio & Kaufmann, 2014; Glick & White, 2004); children too have high expectations in designing their future and career choices (Mahamood et al., 2012).

Studies have found that their choice of field of study is more toward examination result (Giirses et al., 2011). Nevertheless, the study by Delaney et al. (2011) found that student personality traits, parents' attitudes and choice of subject or choice of school are the mediators in shaping the career expectancy and future likelihood of getting good monetary resources. Hence the choice of school and suitable field of study has a positive impact on students (Creed, Conlon, & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2007; Schmitt-Wilson & Welsh, 2012).

Nevertheless, according to Creed et al. (2007) there are obstacles in determining the parental and student expectations when these groups have problems arising from ethnicity, finances, attitude and lack of information. This will affect their choice of school, field of study and later, their career choices.

**Personal Development**

Bloom (1956) classified educational activities into three domains, namely the cognitive (intellectual), affective (attitude, feelings, and emotions) and psychomotor (skills). Hence, personal development of students must take into consideration the context of increase in social skills and skill maturity. Expectations of parents and students in choosing schools arise because students need schools to fulfill the orientation goals and motivating school climate (Atkins et al., 2015; Bear et al., 2011; Ravindran & Kalpana, 2012). The aim of orientation can be to enhance the competency and skill level, to gain self-esteem, or to feel pleasure and enjoyment. A safe school is a school that has student social support, psychological, transitional and emotional support. It involved consistency in skills of social interaction and cognitive, social and psychomotor development. In Malaysia, studies show that one of the factors for current students to select their school is because of the variety of co-curriculum offered by a certain school (Ibrahim, Osman, & Bachok, 2014). Students have high expectations in the cocurriculum performance of a school.

On the other hand, students who continue working after leaving school or who stop school early (work-bound students) have low self expectations and academic achievement (Creed, Patton, & Hood, 2010). This results in low personal skills where they lack self confidence and often feel they have poor personal functioning.

**4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**
In this study, the researcher will use the technique of quantitative research. This research involves the survey methodology using questionnaire entirely for data collection; the questionnaires will be distributed to the parents and students at the selected schools.

In making selection of schools, the researcher chooses research based on purposive sampling. According to Fraenkel et al. (2012) in purposive sampling, the researcher cannot choose easily the sample required but instead the researcher must have justification for selecting the sample. Cohen et al. (2003) stated that purposive sampling is used to choose a sample that can fulfil the needs of the research question and specific research objectives. In this study, the researcher wants to study the perceptions and expectations of parents and students toward the school type. Hence, the sample is chosen guided by clear criteria and fulfils the character desired by the researcher. The researcher selects the sample consisting of students and their parents who are from schools in SBP, Vocational Colleges, Technical Secondary schools, SMKA and SABK.

Subsequently, simple random sampling is used to choose each school from five types of school chosen namely SBP, Vocational College, SM Technical, SMKA and SABK. Simple random sampling is also used for selecting 500 students from Form Four. Indirectly, 500 parents of the chosen students will be answering the questionnaire for parents. The parent questionnaire will be answered by the mother, father, or care giver of the student. Simple random sampling is used because each individual in the population is free and has the same opportunity or probability of being selected (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006).

For data analysis, the statistical test used in this study is Pearson correlation test. The Pearson correlation test is used to identify the significance between perception and expectation of parents and students in choice of secondary school type. This test only reveals the strength or weakness of relationship between two variables.

5. CONCLUSION

Choice of a suitable and quality school is important because it has an impact on determining the direction and future of the student. Parents and students have their own perceptions and expectations in making a choice of school type. Each individual needs to be aware of the educational assets in the challenging and competitive world today.

Hence, this study actually can help students and parents to identify the needs, preferences, or career aspirations that must be chosen. This can affect the perceptions and expectations of parents and students regarding the selection of school type to produce an innovative and skilled generation.

6. REFERENCES


