The contribution of school environment factor toward students' achievement in the English language subject

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to identify the relationship between school environment factors such as peer influence, class size and media usage in school with English Language subject achievement among Form Five students of a school in PasirGudang, Johor by measuring their English language SPM Trial examination results of 2010. The differences of English Language achievement among the students were analysed based on their demographic factor and the influence of the school environment factors (independent variables) on the SPM Trial English Language achievement (dependent variable). Sampling 180 respondents of Form Five students one of the secondary schools in PasirGudang District was chosen to carry out the research. Three research hypotheses were developed for this study. The data was analyzed using SPSS software. Statistical tool such as Pearson Coefficient Correlations, frequency and Multiple Regressions were used to test these hypotheses. There are two types of variables used in this research which are Dependent Variables (DV) and Independent Variables (IV). Students' achievement is classified as theDV while the factors of school environment (teachers' commitment, class size and peer influence) are classified astheIV. A conceptual framework is drawn based on the variables. The results indicated that class size has a weak significant impact towards students' achievement whereas peer influence and media usagedo not have significant impact towards students' achievement.

Introduction

Education in Malaysia has gone through many types of evolution consisting of many types of components. One of the most influential changes is the education system is the language that is used in teaching and learning process before and now is taught as one of the coresubject in school. The reason for English to be taught as a subject is to prepare the students so that they will be able to use the language as a medium of interaction especially in their future career.

There were many researches done in previous study pertaining to the factors that affects student's achievement in English Language. Smith (2005) stated that there are many factors contribute to the underachievement of children (EdSource, 2003; Kober, 2001). While there is a strong correlation between low socioeconomic status, usually defined by the educational level and family income of parents, and poor academic performance, there are also links between various school factors and underachievement (Howard, 2002).

Most of the secondary schools in PasirGudang District have started its operation in less than ten years. New schools usually are having variety of problems and constraints for the first ten years in developing positive culture and as well as to maintain good achievement academically. There are three upcoming schools are going to start their operation in 2011. Some new schools lack media facilities especially with increasing number of students every year and some schools are built with small class size. In fact, new schools also are having high tendency in

negative peer influence as there are still finding or searching new identity in new schools. Therefore these new schools are having various kinds of problems that directly can influence every student achievement academically. Among the issues that have been highlighted were the number of students in some classes was amounted to more than 40 students per class. Furthermore, an issue of peer influence in school is also one of the main concerns among these schools. These factors will directly influence the students' achievements in SPM examination result.

Students in secondary schools do not achieve good grades in English Language. This is because their level of English proficiency is very low. Observation shows that this situation occurs due to the school environment. Students do not have much interest in English subject mainly because their friends were also not interested in the subject and do not encourage them to learn the subject. Furthermore, they do not have much interest in reading English books or magazines or even watch English movie or drama. This is because they do not understand the language and what is being read. They were also taught in a class with big number of students. As a result, they were not given enough attention by the teacher and this causes the students to have poor grades in English subject.

Method

There are 34 secondary schools and 24 primary schools in Pasir Gudang District, and we only choose one school with low

performance in English Language subject from their results in Mid Term Examination, May 2010. Respondents were selected by using simple random sampling. Researchers used Multiple Regression technique to analyse the results extracted from the questionnaires. By using this technique, each factor is analysed in depth.

The research methodology addressed the problem statement by examining the research questions using statistical procedures and analysis techniques. A correctional design was suitable for this study because the degree of relationship between variables is of primary concern. In statistics, relationships are measured by calculating the coefficients of correlation, which generally express the degree of relationship on a scale from -1 and 1, with reflecting a perfect positive correlation, 0 no correlation, and -1 a perfect negative correlation (Gravetter&Wallnau, 2008). The study examined the relationships by using predictive and criterion variables. Predictive variables affect outcomes, and criterion variables depend on the predictive variables (Creswell, 2003). The study investigated the relationship between the levels of school environment factors and student achievement.

There are two types of variables used in this research which are Dependent Variables (DV) and Independent Variables (IV). Students' achievement is classified as a dependent variable while the factors of school environment (teachers' commitment, class size and peer influence) are classified as independent variables. The conceptual framework of this research is as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Result

The Dominant Factor in Affecting Students' Achievement

Table1 shows the correlation between the peer influences, class sizes, media usage and students' achievement.

The results obtained were analyzed by using SPSS. By referring to Table1, it is found that there is an insignificant extremely weak correlation between peer influence and students' achievement (r = 0.11, DF = 178, p = 0.136). So, the peer influence does not affect students' achievement. Therefore, null hypothesis, which is Ho2 that is accepted, where there is no significant relationship between the peer influences with the students' achievement in the English subject. On the other hand, alternative hypothesis, H2, which is that there is a significant relationship between the peer influences towards the students' achievement in the English subject, is rejected.

Besides, there is a significant weak negative correlation between class size and students' achievement (r = -0.25, DF = 178, p = 0.001). Thus, students who are placed in smaller class have higher academic achievement. The alternative hypothesis, H1 is accepted, which is that there is a significant relationship between the class sizes with the students' achievement in the English subject. On the other hand, the null hypothesis, Ho1, which is that there is no significant relationship between the class sizes with the students' achievement in the English language subject, is rejected.

Furthermore, there is insignificant weak correlation between media usage and students' achievement (r = -0.08, DF = 178, p = 0.313). This indicates that the media usage does not affect students' achievement. Thus, the null hypothesis, Ho3, which states that there is no significant relationship between the media usage with the students' achievement in the English subject is accepted. This also means that the alternative hypothesis, H3, which is that there is a significant relationship between the media towards the students' achievement in the English subject, is rejected.

School environment factor: peer influences

There were also seven questions that inquired the peer influence towards the students' achievement, as illustrated in Table 2.

For the first question in this section, which is "My classmates feel proud when I get good grade in English Language subject," 160 respondents or 88.9 per cent of them at least agreed to the question where 4 respondents or 2.2 per cent at least disagreed with the question (M = 3.63, SD =1.27).

For the second question, which is "My classmates feel proud when I get good grade in English Language subject," 158 respondents or 87.8 per cent of them at least agreed to the question where 8 respondents or 4.4 per cent at least disagreed with the question (M = 4.46, SD = 1.01). For the third question, which is "I like English because of my friends," 158 respondents or 88.8 per cent of them at least agreed to the question where 8 respondents or 4.4 per cent at least disagreed with the question (M = 4.23, SD = 0.75).

For the fourth question, which is "My classmates always remind me to finish my homework," 159 or 88.3 per cent of them at least agreed to the question where 8 respondents or 4.4 per cent at least disagreed with the question (M = 4.26, SD = 0.88). For the fifth question, which is "My classmates spend their time to talk with me about homework progress," 166 respondents or 92.2 per cent of them at least agreed to the question where 44 respondents or 24.4 per cent at least disagreed with the question (M = 4.57, SD = 0.85).

For the sixth question, which is "My classmates help me in giving moral supports to study very well in English Language subject.," 160 respondents or 88.9 per cent of them at least agreed to the question where 10 respondents or 5.6 per cent at least disagreed with the question (M = 4.47, SD = 1.07). For the seventh question, "My classmates help me in discussing my English Language homework or lesson," 170 respondents or 94.4 per cent of them at least agreed to the question where 10 respondents or 5.6 per cent at least disagreed with the question (M = 3.97, SD = 0.73).

School environment factor: class size

Another section of the questionnaire seeks the responses of the respondents regarding the relationship between class size and their achievement, as tabulated in Table 3.

The first statement in the third section of the questionnaire is "I think small classes have less discipline problems if compared to large classes.", as illustrated in Table 3 (M = 2.06, SD = 1.17). There are 164 respondents or 91.1 per cent of them at least agreed that small classes have less discipline problems. In contrast, there are 6 respondents or 3.3 per cent of them who at least disagreed with the fact that small classes have less discipline problems if compared to large classes and 10 respondents or 5.6 per cent of the respondents who were unsure of this. This shows that the students have a positive view

towards small classes because most of them think that small classes have fewer discipline problems.

The second statement is "I think small class can help me to get a better score." (M = 3.67, SD = 0.96). 168 respondents or 93.3 per cent of them at least agreed that being in small class helps them to get a better score. In contrast, 10 respondents or 5.6 per cent of them at least disagreed that being in small helps them to get a better score and 2 respondents or 1.1 per cent of the respondents who were unsure of this. From there, we can see that the number of respondents who are at least agreed is higher that the number of respondents who are at least agreed with the statement.

The third statement is "I think the environment in a small class is better if compared to the environment of large class." (M = 3.57, SD = 1.00). 126 respondents or 70 per cent of them at least agreed that the environment of small class is better than the environment in the large class whereas 47 respondents or 26.1 per cent of the respondents at least disagreed that the environment in small class is better than the environment of large class.

The fourth statement is "I feel comfortable in small classes if compared to large classes." (M = 3.87, SD = 0.78). 168 respondents or 93.3 per cent of them at least agreed that they feel comfortable in small classes if compared to large classes whereas 10 respondents or 5.6 per cent of the respondents at least disagreed that they feel comfortable in small classes if compared to large classes.

The fifth statement is "I find it easy to understand the teacher's instruction in small classes if compared to large classes." (M = 3.83, SD = 0.81). 158 respondents or 87.8 per cent of them at least agreed that they find it easy to understand the teacher's instruction in small classes if compared to large classes whereas 10 respondents or 5.6 per cent of the respondents at least disagreed that they find it easy to understand the teacher the teacher's instruction in small classes if compared to large classes.

The sixth statement is "I think the teacher is able to give better attention to every student in small class if compared to large classes." (M = 3.97, SD = 0.38). 104 respondents or 57.6 per cent of them at least agreed that the teacher is able to give better attention to every student in small class if compared to large classes whereas 32 respondents or 17.8 per cent of the respondents at least disagreed that the teacher is able to give better attention to every student in small class if compared to large classes.

The seventh statement is "I can learn more effectively in small classes if compared to large classes" (M = 3.74, SD = 0.77). 167 respondents or 92.8 per cent of them at least agreed that they can learn more effectively in small classes if compared to large classes whereas 4 respondents or 2.2 per cent of the respondents at least disagreed that they can learn more effectively in small classes if compared to large classes. Overall, most respondents responded positively towards each item in this section.

School environment factor: media usage

Table 4 shows the frequency of the responses given regarding the media usage according to the Likert scale.

The frequency table above shows that every media selected in this research was being used in learning English language. All four media has more or less equal amount of usage among the students except for internet. 158 respondents or 87.8 per cent of them agreed that they learn English by reading magazine (M =

3.98, SD = 0.40). On the other hand, 156 students agreed that they learn English from books (M = 3.93, SD = 0.61) and watching TV (M = 3.94, SD = 0.62). Nevertheless, 73 students strongly disagree that they learn English by surfing the Internet (M = 1.98, SD = 0.98). Only 15 students agree that they were able to learn English when they were online.

In determining number of books read per week, a total of 153 students agree that they read more than 5 books within the seven days (M = 3.97, SD = 0.51). A total of 154 students agree that they always use English during their internet session leaving only 7 disagree and 4 strongly disagree (M = 3.93, SD = 0.66).

Relationship between gender, peer influences, class sizes, media usage and students' achievement

Table 5 shows the T-test analysis result of the variables such as gender, class sizes, peer influence, media and students' achievement.

Table 5 shows the mean of peer influences among males (M = 4.26, SD = 3.90) is higher (t = 0.83, DF = 143.4, two-tailed p = 0.410) if compared with the peer influences among females (M = 4.21, SD = 0.47). Besides, the mean of perceived class size among males (M = 3.58, SD = 0.37) is higher (t = 1.31, DF = 105.1, two-tailed p = 0.194) if compared with the perceived class size among females (M = 3.50, SD = 0.31).

Apart from that, the mean of media usage among males (M = 3.70, SD = 0.35) is higher (t = 0.90, DF = 84.9, two-tailed p = 0.372) if compared with the media usage among females (M = 3.65, SD = 0.22). On the other hand, the mean of students' achievement among males (M = 1.98, SD = 1.01) is higher (t = 0.92, DF = 133.1, two-tailed p = 0.360) if compared with the students' achievement among females (M = 4.21, SD = 0.47).

These showed that there is no significant relationship between gender and peer influences, class sizes, media usage and students' achievement. Therefore, null hypothesis, Ho4, which states that there is no significant relationship between genders with class sizes, peer influences, media usage, and students' achievement in the English subject, is accepted. This also indicated that the alternative hypothesis, H4, which states that there is a significant relationship between genders with class sizes, peer influences, media usage, and students' achievement in the English subject, is rejected.

Discussion

This shows that the students have a positive view towards small classes because most of them think that small classes have fewer discipline problems. Haimson (2000) supported our findings as she reported on the reduced class size in New York and found out that there were noticeable declines of discipline problems after reducing class size.

Most of the respondents at least agreed that the environment of small class is better than the environment in the large class. This is consistent with a study conducted by Smith, et al. (2000) on class size reduction in Winsconsin, where the findings of his study indicated that smaller classes provide a positive classroom atmosphere for the students which help them to concentrate on the lesson.

Majority of the respondents at least agreed that the teacher is able to give better attention to every student in small class if compared to large classes. This is supported by Stecher et al. (2001) and Croll and Hastings (1996: 39), where they also found that the teachers were able to spend more time focusing on the students individually when the teacher is placed in a smaller classroom.

There are a few studies have done previously with some relevancy on proving the insignificancy of peer factor towards students' achievement. Peter and Sean (2002) have examined whether peers influence specialty preferences of a medical school class affect students' academic achievement in medical school. They have estimated positive peer effects that disappear when school-specific fixed effects are added to control for the endogenuity of a peer group. They found that the ability of a person's peer group does not affect his board score when the researchers do not control for the endogeneity of peer groups.

However, Aziziet. al (2010) found the opposite outcomes as they carried out a research on the effects of extrinsic motivational factors in learning among students in secondary school in Negeri Sembilan. They found that peer-group is significant related to student's achievement. Peers with the similar attitude towards learning can formed discussion groups and help each other in solving problems during learning sessions.

It was also found that media has no effects in determining the student's achievement. The result of this study is very much similar with Clark (1993) statements that media are "mere vehicles that deliver instruction but do not influence student achievement any more than the truck that delivers our groceries causes changes in our nutrition."

Recommendation

In relation to the findings of the study, this research was done in a small scale and only limited for these particular schools as well as for the low achievements students. A research in a large scale would be suggested for different types of school and with different characteristics of students. This is to determine the validity and reliability of the data applying for a bigger population.

Furthermore, a few more additional factors such as teachers' commitment, parental influence, the students' learning preferences and so on should also be tested in determining the most dominant factor that contributes towards the students' achievement. This is to ensure that, all factors that contribute to the students' achievement are taken into consideration.

Finally, further research, preferably a qualitative study or mixed-method study applying in depth interview would also help in clarifying the factors behind the students' achievements.

Conclusion

The findings of the data collected showed that only one of the school factors is a significant predictor towards the students' achievements, which is class size. The other two factors, peer influence and media used in school are not the significant predictors in the students' achievements. Thus the conclusion for this study were divided into two, which are the factors that are related towards the students' achievements and factors that are unrelated towards the students' achievements.

As for the factors that are related towards the students' achievements, it is found out that the respondents prefer to be in small classes because they feel that there are less discipline problems in small class. The respondents also prefer to be in small classes due to its lower humidity factor and felt more comfortable in small classes.

The respondents prefer to learn in small classes as they can easily understand the teacher instruction. Teachers were able to give more attention to each student in small classes. Teaching and learning is more effective in small classes as perceived by the respondents. Moreover, the respondents felt that getting better score depends on the class size where small classes can help them in getting better score.

There are two factors that have been tested in this study which is unrelated towards the student's achievements. The conclusion was that the respondents do not hesitate to participate by giving ideas during English lesson. The respondents do not like their friends to know their result as they felt that their friends were not supportive for getting good result. Nevertheless, friends do motivate and support the respondents to study English Language. Homework was done individually as there is no practice of reminding friends in finishing homework given by the teacher.

Furthermore, the respondents do not discuss or brainstorm ideas with classmates in completing their homework. Books were the preferred learning materials in school as most of them read more than five books in one week. Magazines and internet were not suitable for teaching and learning process. However, they prefer to use English if they surf the Internet.

The finding of the study was similar with research done by Jamali Ismail (1994). According to Jamali (1994), class size should be reduced to enable the teachers to pay individual attentions to the learners. Jamali also stated that, the smaller the size of the class, the better chance for the teacher to have close interaction with the students. Still, due to lack of English teachers in the current situation, it is suggested that school should only reduce the number of students in one class practically. This is to ensure that no students were left out just to ensure some of them were given extra attention. The same result was also found in a study done by Ehrenberg, et al. (2001).

As a conclusion, it is important for the students to have supportive environment in class in regards to achieve good result in their examination. Providing suitable environment can also maximise the teachers' quality time with the students in class.

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Table1: Correlation between the peer influences, class sizes, media usage and students' achievement

		Achievement	Peer	Class_Size	Media
Achievement	Pearson Correlation	1	.111	-.250(**)	-.076
	Sig. (2-Tailed)		.136	.001	.313
	N	180	180	180	180
Peer	Pearson Correlation	.111	1	.095	.001
	Sig. (2-Tailed)	.136		.205	.986
	N	180	180	180	180
Class_Size	Pearson Correlation	-.250(**)	.095	1	-.028
	Sig. (2-Tailed)	.001	.205		.713
	N	180	180	180	180
Media	Pearson Correlation	-.076	.001	-.028	1
	Sig. (2-Tailed)	.313	.986	.713	
	N	180	180	180	180

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 2: The frequency of the responses regarding peer influence according to the Likert scale

Peer Influence	SD	D	NAD	A	SA	Mean	Std
I always participate in giving ideas during the English language lesson because my friends encourage me to do so.	2	2	16	97	63	3.63	1.269
My classmates feel proud when I get good grade in English Language subject.	4	4	6	38	128	4.46	1.010
I like English because of my friends.	2	2	16	92	68	4.23	0.748
My classmates always remind me to finish my homework.	5	3	13	78	81	4.26	0.880
My classmates spend their time to talk with me about homework progress.	4	4	6	38	128	4.57	0.846
My classmates help me in giving moral supports to study very well in English Language subject.	2	8	10	18	142	4.47	1.065
My classmates help me in discussing my English Language homework or lesson.	6	0	4	146	24	3.97	0.732

Table 3: The frequency of the responses regarding class size according to the Likert scale

Class size	SD	D	NAD	A	SA	Mean	Std
I think small classes have less discipline problems if compared to large classes.	0	6	10	157	7	2.06	1.171
I think small class can help me to get a better score.	4	6	2	158	10	3.67	0.957
I think the environment in a small class is better if compared to the environment of large class.	1	46	7	60	66	3.57	0.998
I feel comfortable in small classes if compared to large classes.	4	6	2	155	13	3.87	0.780
I find it easy to understand the teacher the teacher's instruction in small classes if compared to large classes.	4	6	3	155	12	3.83	0.808
I think the teacher is able to give better attention to every student in small class if compared to large classes.	2	30	16	28	76	3.97	0.380
I can learn more effectively in small classes if compared to large classes.	0	4	9	159	8	3.74	0.770

Table 4: The frequency of the responses regarding the media usage according to the Likert scale

Media usage	SD	D	NAD	A	SA	Mean	StdDev
I learn English by reading books.	1	2	7	156	14	3.93	0.613
I learn English by reading magazines.	0	2	10	158	10	3.98	0.395
I learn English by watching TV.	3	7	1	156	13	3.94	0.618
I learn English by listening to radio or Mp3 player.	2	3	10	155	10	3.93	0.524
I learn English by surfing the Internet.	73	52	40	15	0	1.98	0.983
I used to read more than five English story books per week.	1	4	8	153	14	3.97	0.512
I always to use English when I surf the Internet.	4	7	1	154	14	3.93	0.660

Table 5: The relationship between gender, class sizes, peer influences, media and students' achievement

	gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig. (2-tailed)
Achievment	male	61	1.98	1.008	3.57
	female	119	1.83	1.122	.376
Peer	male	61	4.2623	.38965	.360
	female	119	4.2077	.47335	.439
Class_Size	male	61	3.5761	.36698	.410
	female	119	3.5042	.31111	.169
Media	male	61	3.6956	.34648x	.194
	female	119	3.6519	.21740	.302