

School Engagement among Adolescents from Low Income Family in Kuala Lumpur

Salina Nen, Fauziah Ibrahim, Mohd. Nasir Selamat, Nasrudin
Subhi, Norulhuda Sarnon, Azianura Hani Ahsari, Shahrul
Nazmi Sanusi dan Zaizul Abd. Rahman

Pusat Pemerkasaan Remaja (PERKASA), Faculty of Social Science and Humanities,
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 43600 Bangi Selangor

Email: ifauziah@ukm.edu.my

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Abstract

School engagement influence children's success rates and prevent students from engaging into various social problems. Commitment to school may be influenced by many factors including family background, student-teacher relationship, school peers, and curriculum and co-curricular activities taught at school. The study's two objectives were (1) to measure the level of students' commitment; and (2) to measure the factors that influence students' commitment to the school. This study used quantitative research designs in which questionnaires were the primary tool for data collection. The respondents of this study consisted of 244 teenagers aged between 11-25 years old living in People's Housing (PPR) in Kuala Lumpur. The findings showed that the level of commitment to the school was moderate (50.8%), followed by high levels (43%) and low (6.1%) respectively. Meanwhile, there were four (4) factors identified to affect school commitment, and there were family relationships (23.3%), personal health (7.1%), prosocial behavior (2.3%) and sexual health (2.3%). The combination of the four predictor factors has contributed as much as 34.9% of the variance in school commitment among adolescents living in PPR. The implications and recommendations of this study for risky adolescent interventions were also discussed.

Keywords: School Engagement, High Risk Adolescence, Adolescent Education, Urban Adolescence

Introduction

Malaysians are classified into three (3) categories based on their income levels: T20 (top 20%), M40 (middle 40%), and B40 (bottom 40%). Individuals with a monthly income of RM13, 148 make up the T20 category, according to the Malaysian Department of Statistics. M40 has a monthly minimum income of RM6275, while B40 has a monthly minimum income of RM3900. B40, on the other hand, is more vulnerable to the negative effects of increasing living costs, especially those who live in cities. The B40 community is often linked to poverty, which can

contribute to a variety of psychosocial issues such as mental illness, school dropouts, violence, and drug abuse. Since their limited sources of income affect their quality of living and access to better resources, family members in the B40 community are more vulnerable to different risks than those in the middle- and high-income classes. As a result, a country like Malaysia must pay particular attention to the B40 community for them to continue to benefit from national development facilities without the risk of missing out. Similarly, it is important to ensure that the B40 family's second generation will strengthen and upgrade their lives in order to experience a higher quality of life. One of the focused is ensuring that the younger generation continues to attend school because education is directly related to better jobs and income opportunities.

Literature Review

Many factors influence students' academic achievement, particularly among adolescents. Attendance to school is one of the factors that is said to have a major impact on school students' achievement, especially in secondary school (Tharshini & Fauziah, 2020; Fredricks, 2015; Gosain, 2013; Okwakpam & Okwakpam, 2012). Attendance to school is one of the indicators of students' engagement to the learning process they are undergoing, and whether students will follow all aspects of the school process, including following the subjects taught, completing homework, participation in co-curricular activities, maintaining good relationships with teachers and peers, and active involvement in school-related activities (Fredrick, 2015). Demir and Karabeyoglu (2016), for example, investigated the impact of individual, family, and school factors on school truancy among Burdur primary school students. A total of 581 students in grades 9 to 11 participated in the study, with 44 percent of males and 56 percent of females. The data for the study was gathered using instruments with five domains: personal information, school truancy factors, school engagement, school environment standard, and parental control. According to the findings of their research, students' personal engagement to school became a significant predictor of truancy, followed by parental control. The school atmosphere and truancy activities are moderated by students' dedication to school.

Then there was a study by Oelsner, Lippold, and Greenberg (2011) that looked at the impact of factors like gender, substance abuse, antisocial peers, deviant behavior, and academic achievement on adolescent developmental processes. A total of 2902 high school students took part in the study. According to the findings of their research, adolescent commitment to school declined as they grew older. Male adolescents, on the other hand, were found to have lower connection levels than female adolescents. School density is said to be linked to deviant behavior, antisocial peers, and low academic achievement. Low academic achievement has been linked to an increased risk of substance abuse and school attachment. Person, family, and social environmental influences on substance abuse behaviour in adolescents were investigated in a local study by Rozmi et al (2017). A total of 480 adolescent respondents between the ages of 13 and 17 took part in this survey. According to Rozmi's study, risky conditions in schools account for 45.5 percent of the variation in adolescent substance abuse. Okwakpam and Okwakpam (2012) explored the influence of student characteristics and family history in the causes and truancy among adolescents. Purposive sampling was used to recruit 105 school teachers for the research, which took place in Nigeria. A standardised questionnaire was used to conduct the research. According to the findings of their report, there were substantial variations in family history and student variables. Students with low self-esteem, for example, were more likely to miss school, according to their research.

Furthermore, poor health causes students to miss school and put less effort into their studies. Students with unstable emotions were found to be absent from classes. However, poor academic achievement was found to be unrelated to truancy conduct in this study. In the meantime, factors such as financial difficulties, the death of a parent, a lack of parental control, single parents, parental conflict, parental divorce, and parents' lack of support for education all lead to school truancy. The same study discovered that school influenced truancy activity to some degree. Irrelevant curriculum, inadequate classroom setting, poor teaching abilities, lack of interest in the subjects taught, lack of communication between school-parent, rigid administrative policies, and lack of activity in school are all factors that lead to truancy conduct among high school students, according to all respondents (100%). Community factors also affect school truancy, according to the same survey, with 97 percent of respondents agreeing with this factor. Lack of community support for schools, negative peer impact, gangsterism activities in the community/school, community crisis, lack of quality transportation services in the community, and high rates of illegal activity and violence in the community are only a few of them.

Balkin, Arslan, and Duru (2016) looked at the direct and indirect links between truancy behavior, personal factors (self-perception of academics, attitudes toward teachers, school, goals and motivation/discipline), and family factors (parental education level, income) and academic achievement in a study. This research included a total of 123 high school students. The study discovered that school truancy had a strong negative relationship with school participation. Truancy was found to be negatively associated with academic expectations, attitudes toward school and teachers, goals, motivation, and academic performance in this study. The study's results also indicate that truancy varies depending on the parents' level of education and income. Student's truancy is strongly influenced by family and personal influences. Truancy in the past was also found to be a major predictor of academic achievement in the past, based on SEM analysis. The analysis also reveals that students' previous truancy activity and academic achievement will predict their current school truancy. From these studies, it can be inferred that various internal and external influences affect students' motivation or dedication to school. As a result, the aim of this research was to assess the level and factors that influence school engagement among adolescents from low income family in Kuala Lumpur.

Methodology

1. Research Objective

The primary goals of this study are to (1) assess school commitment among B40 students in PPR, and (2) identify the factors that influence school commitment among B40 students.

2. Research Design

This research is conducted as a quantitative cross-sectional survey. Descriptive tests and stepwise multiple regression analysis were used to evaluate the study results. The 'Statistical Package for the Social Science for Windows (SPSS for Windows) was used to analyse the data. In this study, the following instruments were used:

1. The Commitment to School Scale includes six questions about B40 adolescents' commitment to school. The scale used in this analysis has a high reliability value of 0.734.

2. The Family Relationship Scale includes five questions about B40 adolescents' family relationships. The scale has a reliability value of 0.807.
3. The Support for Prosocial Activity in Adolescents Scale includes four questions about prosocial behaviour support in B40 adolescents. The scale has a reliability score of 0.757.
4. The Personal Health Scale asks B40 adolescents six questions about their personal health. The scale has a reliability value of 0.736.
5. The Sexual Health Scale asks B40 teenagers six questions about their sexual health. The scale has a reliability score of 0.767.

Fauziah et al. (2017) developed all these questionnaires using Likert four-point scales, with the options arranged in order of appropriateness, namely (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) agree, and (4) strongly agree.

3. Descriptive Analysis

The term "descriptive analysis" refers to a statistical technique for describing the characteristics of variables (Chua, 2012). The first study's objective was to measure the level of school engagement among B40 adolescents living in public housing areas, and descriptive analysis such as frequency, mean, percentage, and standard deviation were used in this study to achieve that purpose.

4. Multiple Regression Analysis

Changes in two or more factors (independent variables) that lead to changes in a dependent variable are identified using multiple regression (Chua, 2012). The objective of the second study, which is to identify factors that influence commitment to school among B40 adolescents living in residential areas in Malaysia, is measured using multiple regression analysis using the stepwise method. The stepwise approach has an advantage over other multiple regressions, according to Diekhoff (1992) since it only includes important predictor variables in the regression. The second benefit is that stepwise multiple regression will prevent the multicollinearity issue that occurs when predictor variables have large correlations. This association is irrelevant, and it reduces the accuracy of the study (Diekhoff, 1992). Since these problematic variables would not be included in the regression, this problem can be solved using stepwise multiple regression analysis.

5. Population and Research Sample

The sample population in this study is a group of B40 adolescents who live in people's housing areas in the Klang Valley. The People's Housing Project (PPR) is a housing project for low-income family (Kuala Lumpur City Hall, 2005). A total of 244 adolescents aged 11 to 25 years were included in the study's sample. A total of 244 B40 adolescents were chosen using random sampling, as shown in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Location and Number of Research Sample

No	Research Location	Number of Sample
1	PPR, Desa Rejang	80
2	PPR, Pantai Ria	80
3	PPR Seri Pantai	84
Total		244

6. Survey Collection Process

The researcher was assisted by a research assistant to carry out the survey and data collection process. The researchers provided a short overview and briefing on the data collection methods to the research assistants involved. The questionnaires were distributed in stages according to selected locations. Since all respondents can read and write, the questionnaire was filled out by them and monitored by research team so that they could ask if there were any questions they did not understand.

Results and Discussion

1. Respondents' Profile

In conclusion, based on the backgrounds of all B40 adolescents participating in this study, it was discovered that the majority of those involved in this study are in the middle age group of adolescents, ranging from 16 to 20 years old (57.4%). Most of the respondents (88.9%) are Malays with a secondary education standard of SRP/PMR and SPM (75.8%) and are still in school (76.6%). SRP/SPM is the highest level of education for the respondents' parents, namely the mother (59%) and father (56.2%) respectively. Most of the respondents' mothers (52.9%) were stay-at-home moms, while their fathers worked full-time or part-time (65.6%). According to the aspect of parental marital status, the majority of B40 adolescents in this study admitted that both their parents still live together, and most adolescents living in PPR also reported to have less than five (5) siblings (79.9%). Most of the respondents (97.5%), did not have a family history of substance use. Based on knowledge about the nature of the PERKASA programme, the study discovered that 58.2 percent of them are unaware of the program's existence, which is introduced in their housing, and only 26.6 percent of those who have participated in PERKASA, UKM programmes are aware of its existence. The study also discovered that most of respondents access social media in their own homes (67.6%) and in cyber cafes (32.4%), and that English learning opportunities are mostly provided by teachers in schools (84.4%).

2. School Engagement

The study found that overall respondents living in PPR had a moderate (50.8%) to high level (43%) of engagement to school. Just 6.1 percent of the participants in this study demonstrated a low degree of engagement to the school, which needed to be improved.

Table 2

Level of Commitment Towards School (n=244)

Level	N=244	Percentage (%)	Min
Low	15	6.1	3.03
Moderate	124	50.8	
High	105	43.0	
TOTAL	244	100	

As per Table 3, most respondents living in PPR expressed a strong desire to attend school (86.5 percent - item 1), had positive relationships with their teachers (87.3 - item 2), and reported having good academic achievement (82.8 percent -item3). Most respondents admitted to enjoying co-curricular activities in school (75 percent - item 4) and believed that enjoyable learning was one of the factors that encouraged them to go to school (81.5 percent

-item 5). Even though the respondents' overall dedication to the school was high, the study revealed that 45.9% (item 6) of the respondents confessed to skipping school.

Table 3

School Commitment Scale Percentage and Items

No	Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Disagree
Commitment to School					
Percentage (%)/ Number					
1.	Going to school is something I enjoy doing.	12 (4.9)	21 (8.6)	99 (40.6)	112 (45.9)
2.	My relationship with the school's teachers is good.	12 (4.9)	19 (7.8)	95 (38.9)	118 (48.4)
3.	My academic achievement in school was good	12 (4.9)	30 (12.3)	129 (52.9)	73 (29.9)
4.	I enjoy participating in extracurricular activities at school.	17 (7.0)	44 (18.0)	90 (36.9)	93 (38.1)
5.	I enjoy going to school because learning is fun.	9 (3.7)	36 (14.8)	103 (42.2)	96 (39.3)
6.	I used to skip school.	77 (31.6)	55 (22.5)	79 (32.4)	33 (13.5)

3. Factors affecting school engagement

The study found that four (4) factors influencing engagement to school among respondents in PPR were family relationships, personal health, prosocial behaviour, and sexual health, based on stepwise multiple regression analysis performed with a study sample. According to findings, family relationships [$F(1,225) = 67,836, p.05$] accounted for as much as 23.2 percent of the variance ($R^2 = .232$) in school engagement among PPR respondents. According to this report, the family relationship factor ($\beta = .481, p.05$) is the most important factor affecting school engagement among PPR respondents. Whereas family relationships ($\beta = .362, p.05$) and personal wellbeing ($\beta = .292, p.05$) combined accounted for 7.1 percent of the change in school engagement. Prosocial behavioural factors and personal wellbeing, on the other hand, accounted for 2.3 percent and 1.2 percent of the difference in school engagement, respectively. The combination of these four predictor factors accounted for 34.9 percent of the variance in school commitment among PPR respondents.

Table 4

The Key Factors Affecting Commitment to B40 Adolescents in PPR Based on Regression Test Results (n=244)

Variabel	Beta	R	R ²	F	Sig
Family Relationship	.481	.481	.232	67.836	.000
Personal Health	.292	.550	.303	48.637	.000
Prosocial Behavior	.176	.571	.326	35.884	.000
Sexual Health	-.154	.591	.349	29.720	.000

Dependent Variable: School engagement

The results of this study are in line with Okwakpam and Okwakpam's previous research (2012). Financial difficulties, death, lack of parental control, parental conflict, parental divorce, and a lack of compassion for educational values all have an effect on students' engagement and motivation, according to the researchers. Balkin, Arslan, and Duru (2016) discovered that family factors significantly predicted student truancy. Mental health studies have long shown the importance of intervention and prevention in schools for students who are at risk of developing mental health disorders or who are exhibiting signs of mental illness (Bradshaw et al., 2008). Furthermore, health issues such as frequent illness will cause students to miss school (Okwakpam and Okwakpam, 2012). Md Fadli (2002) defines health as a state or condition in which an individual is in optimal physical, mental, and social well-being, rather than simply being free of disease.

Schools should provide an atmosphere that encourages prosocial activity. Self-control, problem-solving skills, and social skills are examples of prosocial activities. Prosocial behaviour has been shown to be a major indicator of academic achievement in previous research (Heydenberk et al., 2006). Aggressive activities, such as bullying, have a negative impact on students' academic performance and psychosocial well-being (Horne et al., 2007). The nature of students' relationships with their classmates is influenced by their social competence (Fraser, et al., 2005). Peer acceptance and positive emotions are increased by interventions that reinforce social skills and prosocial behaviours. They can, however, discourage students from learning while avoiding delinquent habits such as substance use and other mental health issues.

Another factor that influenced respondents' engagement to school was their sexual health. Positive sexual health behavior should be based on good sexual knowledge. Accurate sexual information can aid adolescents in understanding sexual growth, as well as preserving, controlling, and influencing their emotions and psychological well-being (Low, 2009; Nasrudin, Fauziah, Norulhuda, Salina et al., 2020). Adolescence is also a period when it can be difficult to differentiate between good and immoral acts. This is regarded as a natural and essential part of the development of adolescent moral values (Coon & Mitterer, 2012). However, in Malaysian culture, conversations about sexuality and reproductive health problems are still considered taboo. This is also an uncomfortable topic to bring up for more open discussion among adolescents who are considered too young to discuss sexual matters. Adolescents who have had a good sexual experience, on the other hand, have good sexual behaviours. Adolescents who have had poor sexual experiences, on the other hand, have unrealistic perceptions of sexual encounters, which leads to risky sexual conduct (Aini &

Ramadhy, 2013; Norulhuda, Mohamad, Fauziah et al., 2012; Alavi, Nen, Fauziah et al., 2012). Haglund and Fehring's (2010) findings show that early exposure to sexual information is important for adolescents because those who receive formal sexual education are 17 percent less likely to engage in sexual activity than those who do not.

The following are recommendations based on the study's findings to help increase the participation of students from low-income and at-risk families in school:

- The school improves its current facilities so that students can take advantage of them to their full potential. They are, for example, improving psychological and counselling services in schools to assist students who are dealing with personal and social issues at home or at school. Furthermore, involving departments such as the police is crucial in fostering a sense of security and preventing the spread of deviant behaviour in schools.
- Collaboration between parents and school administration should be improved. More regular meetings with the school and parents to identify current needs and problems that can impact a student's academic success. This allows issues to be addressed more quickly and efficiently.
- Expand the school's social network to include more community organisations that can contribute ideas for more active social events, projects, visits, and exposures for students. The learning process is more exciting and meaningful when there is a social network between the school and other stakeholders.

Conclusion

Family relationships, personal wellbeing, prosocial behaviour, and sexual health among adolescents living in PPR must be strengthened by programmes organised by stakeholders to enhance and increase school engagement among adolescents living in PPR. More school programmes are needed to help at-risk students strengthen their family relationships, personal wellbeing, prosocial attitudes, and sexual health. The results of this report, for example, can be used by school counsellors to influence programme approaches that focus on the important factors discussed above. The programme that will be introduced must be flexible enough to meet the needs of students in this group while still being cost-effective enough for students to participate. Furthermore, an intervention that incorporates the roles of schools, parents/families, and the community in the creation of a conducive learning and schooling atmosphere for students is needed. These variables may be used to resolve the signs of truancy or school dropout, increasing student interest and dedication to the school.

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