

THE ATTRIBUTIONS OF ACADEMIC AND CO-CURRICULAR SUCCESS OF MALAY AND CHINESE STUDENTS IN UNIVERSITI KEBANGSAAN MALAYSIA

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Abstract

This study attempts to identify and classify the attributes of academic success and determine the differences of these attributes among high-achieving Malay students and their Chinese peers with equivalent achievements, and low-achieving Malay students with high-achieving Malay students. For the purpose of this study, 20 Malay students and 20 Chinese students were made subjects of the research. From the study, a total of 15 attributes to success were identified, among which included perspective towards studies, study methodology, lecturers' demeanor and approach, financial status and fluency in English. Aside from these, ten of the attributes were found to differ for students whose achievement can be attributed to ethnicity and eight different attributes for Malay and Chinese students based on academic prowess and accomplishment.

INTRODUCTION

It is common these days to view articles in the papers on how Malay students are presumed to be average achievers in their studies compared to Chinese students. According to (1984), the difference between the academic accomplishments of Malay and Chinese students begins from their primary education. In the *Peperiksaan Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah (UPSR)*, there is a 55% difference in the marks obtained by Malay and Chinese students. Due to the fact that primary education forms the basis for secondary education, any disadvantage in the former will translate itself into the latter. A study on the weak points of UKM students (1993) found that the level of achievement of Malay students had decreased in the mastering of formal courses and general knowledge. There are of course Malays students who excel at the secondary education level, but do not carry forward their success to the tertiary level. For example, the nation was stunned by the success of Nur Amalina Che Bakri who created a record by achieving 17A1's in the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) examination.

This remarkable young lady was a student at the Ulu Tiram Secondary School in Johor Bahru, and was bestowed the honour of being the best student for SPM 2004. However, does her success represent all the achievements of Malay students in their entirety? The answer to that is, in comparison, her one achievement is only a minor representation compared to the many Chinese student high-achievers in the country. This fact is also made clear by viewing the list of graduates of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) for the years 2002, 2003 and 2004. Of the Malay student body, 24.3 % received First Class Honours or Second Upper compared to the 63.5 % of Chinese students. On the flip side, more than 600 Malay students from the 2003/2004 session received an average grade of C and below.

The question at this juncture is, does the factor of religion somehow cause its followers – who are all Malay – to perform inadequately academically? This is because Islam is not a religion that denies or shuns worldly affairs; quite the contrary, Islam urges its followers to balance worldly necessities with that of the Hereafter. The following verse from the al-Quran may clarify this further:

And of them there are some who say: "Our Lord! Give us in this world that which is good and in the Hereafter that which is good and save us from the torment of the Fire!"(2: 201)

In another verse, Allah S.W.T Says:

But seek with that (wealth) which Allah has bestowed on you the home of the Hereafter, and forget not your portion of lawful enjoyment in this world. (28: 77).

Many cross-cultural studies have found that individuals who come from different cultural environments attribute certain actions to different factors. Fry and Ghosh (1980) postulated that cultural and ethnic factors may influence the attributes of success and failure. Among the reasons for success and failure in events related to achievement are ability, effort, work ethic and luck (Weiner, Frieze, Kukla, Reed & Rossenburgh, 1071). These reasons or findings in turn possess internal and external characteristics (Rotter, 1966) and qualities of stability (Weiner, 1974).

The objective of this research is to:

- (a) Determine the factors in a students' life that develop into or form attributes to their academic success
- (b) Classify these attributes based on Weiner's Attribution Theory of Motivation (1974).
- (c) Compare these attributes between high-achieving Malay students and their Chinese peers with similar achievements.
- (d) Compare these attributes between low-achieving Malay students with high-achieving Chinese students.

It is hoped that the result of this study can provide an accurate depiction of the gap between the accomplishments of Malay and Chinese students in local institutions of higher learning such as Universiti Kebagsaan Malaysia. It is also hoped that this research can assist institutions of higher learning to devise a programme for the purpose of helping students who are below average overcome their academic challenges.

Academic Achievements among Malay Students

The poor achievements of Malay students in the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) Examination results in their being less in number in Form 6 and, by proxy, university. For example, for the Government school Form 6 intake in the year 2002, only 3,500 Malay students were accepted compared to the 10,770 Chinese students. From this number, a mere 770 Malay students were further accepted into University compared to the 9 020 Chinese students. From the viewpoint of achievement in the Sijil Tinggi Persekolahan Malaysia (STPM) Examination for students who were accepted into University, most of the Malay students obtained a B or a C for those taking the Arts stream and a C or a D for those in the Science stream. On the other hand, most of the Chinese students from both streams obtained either an A or a B (Mohd. Yunus Mohd. Nor, 2002). Furthermore, according to the 2002 study on the weak points of UKM students, most of the Malay students accepted to UKM were found to be weak in English and Mathematics.

According to Awang Had Salleh (1996), the academic accomplishments among Malay students differ in whole from that of Chinese students, being more average and lower than that of the latter. Regardless, there are a number of Malay students who achieve academic excellence, but their numbers are few and far between compared to that of Chinese students.

Aside from academic attainment at SPM and STPM level, the attitude or mindset of students towards academics also directly influences their academic success or failure. According to Abdul Halim Othman (1994), many Malay students still possess the assumption that scholarships and university education is a right and not a privilege to the Bumiputeras. In addition, there are also students who presume that once they have entered university it is thus the university's responsibility to provide them with scholarships, and that as scholarship students their future employment will be guaranteed. With this notion, these students feel that they are safe and therefore do not need to work so hard to achieve academic excellence. Again according to Abdul Halim Othman (1994), negative attitude among students also causes them to not attend lectures and tutorials, pay less attention to academic assignments and not utilize university facilities such as libraries, recreational spots and counseling services.

These abovementioned weaknesses among Malay students are part of the reason for their below-average academic achievement in Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. For example, for the award of Bachelors' Degrees in Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, the average for three sessions (2001, 2002, and 2003) was 0.4 % of Malay students received First Class Honours, 3.4 % of Chinese students received First Class Honours, and 21.3 % of Malay students and 53.8 % of Chinese students obtained Second Class Upper. For the same three sessions, 53.1 % of Malay students and 37.4 % of Chinese students obtained Second Class Lower degrees, and 10.4 % of Malay students and 0.4 % of Chinese students receive Third Class degrees.

According to Kamaruddin Haji Kachar (1994), Malay students do not excel because are unaware that their people are still left behind. They pay less attention to main issues and give more attention to less-important issues. As per Amir Awang (1996), despite Malay students possessing the desire to achieve success, they rarely aim to obtain A First Class Honours or Second Upper. On the contrary, they generally wish to merely pass. Additionally, according to him Amir Awang, most Malay students do not have the right study or learning techniques, and do not manage their time effectively. Their preferred method of study is individual study rather than group study efforts, and they would more readily socialize with students of their own ethnicity than those of others. Yet another prominent factor of weakness in Malay students is the inability to master English due to their lack of reading material in that language.

Weiner's Attribution Theory of Motivation

The attribution theory is a cognitive theory that disseminates how individuals perceive and interpret events and how this relates to their thinking and behaviour. Weiner's Attribution Theory of Motivation (1974) is specifically concerned with how people understand the reasons for their successes and failures. The theory is based on the paradigm "perception – thought/judgment – action" that was first put forward by Heider (Weiner, 1974) and Rotter (1966). According to Heider, the cause of the given behavior is assigned to the individual's characteristics such as ability, personality, mood, efforts, attitudes, or disposition, also known as internal factors. When the cause of the given behavior is assigned to the situation in which the behavior was seen such as the difficulty of the task, other people, or luck, these are known as external factors.

Rotter (1954) developed a theoretical guideline named the "locus of control" which was classified into "internal locus" and "external locus". According to Rotter, individuals with a high internal locus of control believe that events result primarily from their own behavior and actions, whereas those with a high external locus of control believe that powerful others, fate, or chance primarily determine events. He continues that if an individual perceives that events are caused by internal factors, he will most likely see the same effect (of success) in the future. However, if an individual perceives that events are caused by external factors, the likelihood of the effect of these events being repeated will be lower.

Weiner (1974) combined Heider's and Rotter's theories by developing a form of attribution theory that explains the emotional and motivational entailments of academic success and failure. He defined four main attributes to that end: ability, effort, task difficulty and luck. These attributes or factors are further explained in two dimensions, the locus dimension and the stability dimension. "Ability" is classified as being "internal – stable", "efforts" as "internal – unstable", "task difficulty" as "external – stable" and "luck" as "external – unstable". According to Weiner (1974), individuals who enjoy academic success generally lean toward attributing their success to stable internal factors, whereas individuals who attribute their success to unstable factors do not generally label success as a desired achievement. On the flip side, individuals who attribute their failures to stable factors tend to expect failure, and therefore put in more effort to overcome it.

The Attributions of Academic Success and Achievement

Chapman and Lawes (1984) found that students who excelled in examinations cited internal factors as being the key to determining their success, whereas unstable external factors played a less important role. There are many studies that present the existence of a correlation between academic achievement and internal and external attributions. Normally, an individual relates his success to internal factors such as ability and effort, and his failures to external factors such as task difficulty, lack of assistance or help from teachers, parental and peer issues, and bad luck (Frieze & Weiner, 1971; Nicholas, 1975 Muruyama, 1979). Successful students also describe effort as being the most important factor in determining their academic accomplishments, while students who are less successful attribute their weakness to luck (Weiner, 1972; Kukla, 1972). Furthermore, Ashkanasy and Gallois (1987) found that individuals who possessed an internal locus of control that focused more on ability and effort to achieve success were more likely to do so than individuals who had an external locus of control.

The level of achievement motivation also bears relation to an individuals' locus of control. Those with high motivation were more likely to attribute their success to themselves compared to those with low motivation (Weiner & Kukla, 1970). Moreover, Lao (1970) found that students with internal locus of control were generally academic high-achievers, whereas students with external locus of control were not. This means that internal locus of control has a positive correlation to academic success. People with this particular locus tend to believe more in factors to do with themselves such as ability and effort rather than external factors such as luck and task difficulty.

In addition, many cross-cultural studies have proven that individuals who come from different cultural backgrounds and environments attribute given events differently as well (Williog, Harnish, Hill & Maehr, 1983; Betancourt & Weiner, 1982). Betancourt and Weiner (1982) stated that effort and ability are the main attributes of success in the US, whereas in India the main attribute is social decorum. A study by Fry and Ghosh (1980) found that Caucasian children in Canada attributed their achievements to personal advantages and their failures to luck, whereas children in India attributed their achievements to their personal responsibility.

A local study was conducted by Keats and Mohamad Haji Yusuf (1976) on school-children in Malaysia and Australia from four ethnic groups, which were Malays, Chinese, Indians and Australians. The study recommended a new attribute be added which was the teacher, other than the four attributes developed by Weiner (1974). The research found that Malay students attributed their success in school to hard work, the Chinese students to personal effort and ability, the Indian students to the teacher and the Australian students to their own capability. Wan Rafaei Abdul Rahman (1984) also conducted studies among Malay and Chinese students. The study found that in general, Malay and Chinese students attributed their success to factors of ability and effort. Research associated with ethnicity and culture show that individuals from different cultures also possess different locus of control. Due to the fact that locus of control can influence success, it may be an important tool in explaining the variety of academic achievements among different ethnicities.

METHOD

Research Subjects and Instruments

This research was conducted at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. The research subjects comprised first to third year students from the Faculty of Economy and Business, the Faculty of Islamic Studies, the Faculty of Social Sciences & Humanities, the Faculty of Education, the Law Faculty, the Faculty of Engineering, the Faculty of Science and Technology and the Faculty of Information Science Technology. All Malay students with high-achievements and lower-average achievements plus all high-achieving Chinese students were used as research samples. Chinese students of lower-average capability were not considered as research samples because they were too few in number. In this study, academic accomplishment is evaluated based on the samples grades obtained during the 2004 academic session. Only students who obtained a high grade point average (A or B) and a low grade point average (D, E or F) were taken as research subjects.

Of the 50 research subjects, 40 students who returned the questionnaire were chosen as primary subjects. From this total, 10 (25%) were high-achieving Malay students, 10 (25 %) were lower-average Malay students, and 20 (50%) were high-achieving Chinese students. From the aspect of gender, 30 (70 %) of the subjects were female students and 10 (30%) of them were male students. Further, from the position of academic year, 25 (65%) of the subjects were First Year students and 15 (35%) were Second Year students.

This study utilized questionnaires as an instrument. The questionnaire was developed based on previous research in Malaysia and consists of two parts. Section A contains items regarding the subjects' background and personal information such as faculty, academic year, age, gender, ethnic group, address or domicile and marriage status. Section B on the other hand consists of 97 items that measure 15 attributes of students' academic success, which are approach towards education, study methods, interaction with lecturers, ideological beliefs, attitude towards peers, viewpoint on the future, involvement in co-curricular activities, fluency in bahasa Malaysia, fluency in English, the education system, use of hostel or college facilities, use of library facilities, financial status, views on the functions of co-curriculum and lecturers' behaviour, manner and demeanor.

Data Collection and Analysis

The distribution of the questionnaires was conducted with the cooperation of the faculties involved. The questionnaires, together with a namelist and academic year were given to the offices of the colleges with the assistance of the college fellows. Next, information on student achievement was obtained directly from the Academic Department to control the validity of the information.

Schedule 1: Classification of Attributes of Success According to Weiner's Attribution Theory

| Dimension | Attributes of Academic Success |
|---------------------|---|
| Internal – Stable | Approach towards education Study methods Interaction with lecturer Ideological beliefs Attitude towards peers Viewpoint regarding the future |
| Internal -Unstable | Involvement in co-curricular activities Fluency in Bahasa Malaysia Fluency in English |
| External – Stable | Education system Use of college/hostel facilities Use of library facilities Financial status |
| External - Unstable | View on function of co-curriculum Lecturers' attitude, manner and demeanor |

The final step was analyzing the data from the 40 returned questionnaires using a computer and SPSS (Statistics for Social Sciences). The factor analysis method was applied to choose the items for each attribute to academic success. A minimum factor of 0.3 was used to choose the said items. From the analysis conducted, 22 items were discarded and the remaining 75 items were used to represent the 15 attributes of success. The next step was to classify these attributes according to Weiner's attributes (1974) into four dimensions as categorized in Schedule 1. These dimensions are (i) internal – stable, (ii) internal – unstable, (iii) external – stable and, (iv) external – unstable. From the aspect of credibility, these items possess a split-half index equivalent to 0.77.

Lastly, a ' - t' test was applied to examine the differences between the attributes of academic success for Malay high-achieving students and Chinese high-achieving students, and Malay lower-average students and Malay high-achieving students. A significance level of 0.05 was set for all the abovementioned tests.

RESEARCH LIMITATION

This study attempts to determine whether or not there exist differences in the attributes of academic success among high-achieving students according to ethnicity. A '-t' Test was used to examine these differences. Schedule 2 shows the resulting differences in attributes between high-achieving Malay students and Chinese high-achieving students.

Schedule 2: The Difference in Attributes of Success in High-Achieving Students According to Ethnicity

| Attribute | | Min | SP | t |
|---|----|-------|------|--------|
| Approach towards education | | | | |
| Malay | 20 | 25.65 | 3.01 | -0.52 |
| Chinese | 20 | 25.89 | 2.87 | |
| Study methods | | | | |
| Malay | 20 | 26.73 | 4.86 | 0.78 |
| Chinese | 20 | 26.22 | 4.92 | |
| Viewpoint regarding the future | | | | |
| Malay | 20 | 26.45 | 4.87 | 0.94 |
| Chinese | 20 | 26.21 | 4.96 | |
| Involvement in co-curricular activities | | | | |
| Malay | 20 | 21.57 | 4.98 | -1.97* |
| Chinese | 20 | 25.56 | 3.74 | |
| Fluency in bahasa Malaysia | | | | |
| Malay | 20 | 10.86 | 3.97 | 5.29* |
| Chinese | 20 | 27.65 | 3.98 | |
| Fluency in English | | | | |
| Malay | 20 | 11.72 | 3.87 | -6.57* |
| Chinese | 20 | 12.65 | 4.76 | |
| Education system | | | | |
| Malay | 20 | 12.23 | 2.57 | 2.67* |
| Chinese | 20 | 11.54 | 2.87 | |
| Use of hostel/college facilities | | | | |
| Malay | 20 | 16.87 | 4.02 | -1.76 |
| Chinese | 20 | 17.89 | 4.59 | |
| Interaction with lecturers | | | | |
| Malay | 20 | 8.24 | 1.76 | 3.45* |
| Chinese | 20 | 5.72 | 1.70 | |
| Ideological beliefs | | | | |
| Malay | 20 | 18.76 | 2.76 | 8.10* |
| Chinese | 20 | 19.55 | 2.34 | |
| Attitude towards peers | | | | |
| Malay | 20 | 16.12 | 2.71 | .25* |
| Chinese | 20 | 17.4 | 2.63 | |
| Lecturers' manner and demeanor | | | | |
| Malay | 20 | 11.67 | 1.95 | 2.18* |
| Chinese | 20 | 10.54 | 1.43 | |
| View on function of co-curriculum | | | | |
| Malay | 20 | 19.76 | 3.97 | 3.99 |
| Chinese | 20 | 18.26 | 2.65 | |
| Financial status | | | | |
| Malay | 20 | 12.76 | 3.17 | 2.13* |
| Chinese | 20 | 12.75 | 3.13 | |
| Use of library facilities | | | | |
| Malay | 20 | 17.15 | 2.75 | 1.09 |
| Chinese | 20 | 16.23 | 2.17 | |

Note: n= sample size ; SP= sisihan piawai; t= value -t,
 * = significant at level 0.05

The results recorded in Schedule 2 show the following: for approach towards education ($t = -0.52$, $k > 0.05$), study methods ($t = 0.78$, $k > 0.05$), viewpoint regarding the future ($t = 0.94$, $k > 0.05$), use of college/hostel facilities ($t = -1.76$, $k > 0.05$) and use of library facilities ($t = 1.09$, $k > 0.05$) as attributes to success among high-achieving Malay students with high-achieving Chinese students, the difference is insignificant. However, in the case of the following attributes for success: relation with lecturer ($t = 3.45$, $k < 0.05$), ideological beliefs ($t = 8.10$, $k < 0.05$), attitude towards peers ($t = 0.25$, $k < 0.05$), involvement in co-curricular activities ($t = 3.99$, $k < 0.05$), fluency in English ($t = -2.13$, $k < 0.05$), education system ($t = -4.32$, $k < 0.05$), financial status ($t = -2.34$, $k < 0.05$), view on the function of co-curriculum ($t = -1.53$, $k < 0.05$), and lecturer's manner and demeanor ($t = -2.95$, $k < 0.05$), there is a significant difference in the results between high-achieving Malay students and high-achieving Chinese students.

Schedule 3: The Difference in Attributes of Success for Malay Students According to Academic Achievement

| Attribute | n | Min | SP | t |
|---|----|-------|------|--------|
| Approach towards education | | | | |
| Low-Achievers | 20 | 23.45 | 3.54 | -5.43* |
| High-Achievers | 20 | 25.67 | 3.04 | |
| Study methods | | | | |
| Low-Achievers | 20 | 21.98 | 4.98 | -6.23* |
| High-Achievers | 20 | 25.98 | 4.21 | |
| Interaction with lecturers | | | | |
| Low-Achievers | 20 | 5.42 | 2.01 | -2.23* |
| High-Achievers | 20 | 6.21 | 1.97 | |
| Ideological beliefs | | | | |
| Low-Achievers | 20 | 18.43 | 2.99 | -0.77 |
| High-Achievers | 20 | 19.74 | 2.55 | |
| Attitude towards peers | | | | |
| Low-Achievers | 20 | 16.00 | 2.96 | -0.34 |
| High-Achievers | 20 | 17.43 | 3.09 | |
| Viewpoint regarding the future | | | | |
| Low-Achievers | 20 | 18.06 | 2.99 | -0.55 |
| High-Achievers | 20 | 21.98 | 6.98 | |
| Involvement in co-curricular activities | | | | |
| Low-Achievers | 20 | 26.98 | 3.46 | 0.34 |
| High-Achievers | 20 | 27.53 | 4.23 | |
| Fluency in bahasa Malaysia | | | | |
| Low-Achievers | 20 | 7.32 | 1.12 | 1.05 |
| High-Achievers | 20 | 7.54 | 1.22 | |
| Fluency in English | | | | |
| Low-Achievers | 20 | 9.69 | 3.21 | -2.13* |
| High-Achievers | 20 | 11.74 | 3.71 | |
| Education System | | | | |
| Low-Achievers | 20 | 10.32 | 3.21 | -4.32* |
| High-Achievers | 20 | 12.34 | 3.98 | |
| Use of hostel/college facilities | | | | |
| Low-Achievers | 20 | 16.25 | 4.72 | -0.97 |
| High-Achievers | 20 | 15.23 | 3.20 | |

| | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|----|-------|------|--------|
| Use of library facilities | | | | |
| Low-Achievers | 20 | 17.21 | 3.22 | -0.34 |
| High-Achievers | 20 | 21.23 | 2.17 | |
| Financial status | | | | |
| Low-Achievers | 20 | 10.75 | 3.22 | -2.34* |
| High-Achievers | 20 | 11.25 | 2.64 | |
| View on the function of co-curriculum | | | | |
| Low-Achievers | 20 | 17.23 | 2.35 | -1.53 |
| High-Achievers | 20 | 12.76 | 3.19 | |
| Lecturers' manner and demeanor | | | | |
| Low-Achievers | 20 | 9.33 | 1.27 | -2.95* |
| High-Achievers | 20 | 10.24 | 1.87 | |

Note: n= sample size; SP= sisihan piawai; t= valuei -t,

* = significant at level 0.05

Schedule 3 shows the results for differences in attributes among low-achieving Malay students and high-achieving Malay students. The results show that for ideological beliefs ($t = 2.99, k > 0.05$), attitude towards peers ($t = -0.34, k > 0.05$), involvement in co-curricular activities ($t = 0.34, k > 0.05$), fluency in bahasa Malaysia ($t = 1.05, k > 0.05$), use of hostel/college facilities ($t = -0.97, k > 0.05$), use of library facilities ($t = -0.34, k > 0.05$), and views on the function of co-curriculum ($t = -1.53, k > 0.05$) as attributes for success among low-achieving Malay students and high-achieving Malay students, the difference is insignificant. On the contrary, there is a significant difference in the following attributes between low-achieving Malay students and high-achieving Malay students: approach towards education ($t = -5.43, k < 0.05$), study methods ($t = -6.23, k < 0.05$), interaction with lecturer ($t = -2.23, k < 0.05$), views on the future ($t = -0.55, k < 0.05$), fluency in English ($t = -2.13, k < 0.05$), education system ($t = -4.32, k < 0.05$), financial status ($t = -2.34, k < 0.05$) and lecturers' manner and demeanor ($t = -2.95, k < 0.05$).

RESEARCH IMPLICATION

The attributes of success for Malay and Chinese students can be applied as ways to raise the level of weak students in Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, specifically Malay students. To this end, the attribute markers can be categorized as "mind-sets" and "skills". The mind-set markers are education system, approach towards education, attitude towards peers, viewpoint regarding the future, view on the function of co-curriculum, participation in co-curricular activities and principles of thought. Any programmes designed to raise students' academic proficiency must take into account the improvement of the aforementioned attitudes and skills. In order to build up the students approach towards their studies, it is recommended that Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia creates more programmes in the form of seminars and workshops, especially during the orientation week for freshmen to provide them with an awareness regarding the importance of education and the difference between learning in school and learning in an institution of higher education. The differences include choosing the right course, schedule management, lectures and tutorials, assignments and projects, field work, field trips and interaction with lecturers. They should also be made aware of the examination and assessment methods in university, the responsibilities in managing their studies, the importance of attending tutorials and discussion sessions and also clear knowledge of their aims to succeed.

From the aspect of skills, seminars and workshops should be held regularly to train students to study effectively and more efficiently. This should also include training them on how to take notes from lectures and reference material, searching for and reading the reference books recommended by lecturers, fact-memorising techniques, paying attention to studies, pre-examination revision and time-management. Aside from that, they should also be trained in listening, speaking, reading and writing skills in both bahasa Malaysia and English. These skills may indirectly encourage them to understand student groups. For the attribute "financial status", high-achieving Malay students tend to attribute this factor more to success than high-achieving Chinese students and also low-achieving Malay students. In his study on the problematic issues faced by Malay students in university, Amir Awang (1994) states that despite many of them receiving some form of scholarship, they are not very adept at managing their finances. This therefore causes the factor of finances to become an attribute of their success.

From a personal nature aspect, students are advised to not be individualistic, not be easily influenced by certain beliefs and be aware of the relationship between religion and everyday life. This is because according to the study, Chinese students are more racially biased and do not mingle with other ethnicities compared to the Malay students in the activities that were conducted. They are also encouraged to involve themselves in co-curricular activities and be given awareness that these activities will help then increase their academic abilities, their health, their communication skills, their social skills, their leadership qualities, and other personality traits that will eventually lead to job opportunity. Aside from that, they are also recommended to mingle with students of different ethnicities, gender and religion and are made aware that peers and friends may help them overcome their academic and personal problems, and also pose a friendly challenge to study very hard. Further, they are encouraged to work during the holidays to collect money for their studies. With regards to guarantee for the future, students must be exposed to the work that is required and the suitable course for that job. This can alleviate any worries students may have about their future.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Internal Attributes – Stable

This research found six attributes of success in the dimension of “internal-stable”, namely, approach toward education, study methods, interaction with lecturers, ideological beliefs, attitude towards peers and viewpoint regarding the future. The analysis result shows that high-achieving Malay students tend to attribute “approach towards education” more to success than low-achieving Malay students, but same as high-achieving Chinese students. This finding supports the statement that high-achieving students have a tendency to attribute success to internal factors (Weiner & Kulka, 1970; Weiner et al. 1971; Weiner, 1972) and that approach to education has a positive relation with academic achievement (Fitt, 1957; Adam, 1962; Brodie, 1964; Hungerman, 1967; Neale, 1967).

This study also found that high-achieving Malay students attributed “study methods” more to success than low-achieving Malay students, but the same as high-achieving Chinese students. This finding also supports the statement that a high-achiever usually plans his study process (Marvin 7 Thomas, 1973), is highly motivated and succeeds by using the lesson plan he has devised (Entwish 1980). On the other hand, low-achieving students were found to stress more on preparation for examinations, and did not pay as much attention to aspects of correct reading techniques, note-taking, focusing and effective time-management (Tan Tuan Hock, 1985).

Furthermore, this research also found that high-achieving Malay students attributed “interaction with lecturer” more to success than high-achieving Chinese students and low-achieving Malay students. Malay students in general have low self-esteem and assume that lecturers look down on them (Amir Awang 1984; Abdul Halim Othman, 1984). This gives rise to psychological reactions such as fear or shyness in asking questions, answering questions, approaching lecturers and engaging in discussion with them. This situation invariably causes their failure to excel academically. Also, high-achieving Malay students were found to attribute “ideological beliefs” to success more than high-achieving Chinese students, but similar to low-achieving Malay students. Different ideological beliefs among Malay students cause them to spend a lot of their time in activities that bear no relation to academics (Study on Weaknesses of Students at UKM, 2002). This study also found that high-achieving Malay students attribute “attitude towards peers” less to success than high-achieving Chinese students, but similar to low-achieving Malay students. In their general socializing, Malay students prefer to socialize with students of different ethnic backgrounds, compared to Chinese students who would rather mingle with their own people.

This attitude also results in the academic level of Chinese students being higher than that of Malay students. Finally, high-achieving Malay students were found to attribute “viewpoint on the future” more to success than low-achieving Malay students but similar to high-achieving Chinese students. The worry that high-achieving students have about their future causes them to work harder to achieve academic excellence.

Internal Attributes – Unstable

The study found three “internal – unstable” attributes of success, namely, involvement in co-curricular activities, fluency in Bahasa Malaysia and fluency in English. The results of the analysis show that high-achieving Malay students and low-achieving Malay students both attribute this factor equally.

The reason why there is no difference among the Malay students is because a large number of them do involve themselves in co-curricular activities without any relation to academic accomplishment (Amir Awang, 1993).

The study found that high-achieving Malay students attributed “fluency in bahasa Malaysia” to success than high-achieving Chinese students but same as low-achieving Malay students. However, high-achieving Chinese students attributed “fluency in English” more to success than high-achieving Malay students, who in turn attributed it more to success than low-achieving Malay students. In the context of studying at university, it is more important to master both these languages because assessment and grade assignment stresses on mastery of language in delivery. Aside from that, both languages are also important for referencing and extra reading material.

External Attributes – Stable

The research found four “external – stable” attributes of success, which are, education system, use of hostel/college facilities, use of library facilities and financial status. The analysis results show that high-achieving Malay students attributed “education system” more to success than low-achieving Malay students. This finding also supports the Study on the Weaknesses of Students at UKM (2002), who tended to find that a large number of assignments such as projects, working papers and homework were a burden upon Malay students.

External Attributes – Unstable

This study found two “external – unstable” attributes to success, which are, views on co-curriculum and lecturers’ manner and demeanor. The analysis results show that high-achieving Malay students tend to attribute “views on co-curriculum” more to success than high-achieving Chinese students, but no different from low-achieving Malay students. Finally this study also found that high-achieving Malay students tend to attribute “lecturers’ manner and demeanor” more to success than low-achieving Malay students. This finding supports Weiner’s (1979) research that showed a class with full support from its teacher has a positive relation to academic success.

CONCLUSION

The objective of this study is to determine and to classify several attributes of academic success and compare the attributes contained in this study among high-achieving students according to ethnicity and among Malay students according to their academic achievement. Generally, high-achieving Malay students were found to attribute the following factors to their success:

- (a) Interaction with lecturers
- (b) Ideological beliefs
- (c) Fluency in bahasa Malaysia
- (d) Education system
- (e) Financial status
- (f) Views on function of co-curriculum
- (g) Lecturers’ manner and demeanor towards their academic success if compared to high-achieving Chinese students.

The research also found that there is a marked difference in attribution between Malay and Chinese students, where high-achieving Chinese students tended to attribute the following factors more to success:

- (a) Attitude towards peers
- (b) Involvement in co-curricular activities
- (c) Fluency in English as an attribute to their academic success if compared to high-achieving Malay students.

Furthermore, high-achieving Malay students attributed the factors

- (a) Approach towards education
- (b) Study methods
- (c) Interaction with lecturers
- (d) Perspective towards the future
- (e) Fluency in English
- (f) Education system
- (g) Financial status

- (h) Lecturers' manner and demeanor towards their academic success if compared to low-achieving Malay students.

In all, high-achieving Malay students attribute their academic success to both internal and external factors, whereas high-achieving Chinese students attribute their success more to internal factors.

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