

The influence of socio-economic status among matriculation students in selecting university and undergraduate program

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Abstract

This paper discusses the influence of socio-economic status (SES) among matriculation students' on their decision in selecting university and undergraduate program at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM). The research was conducted at two local matriculation colleges and 496 students were participated as respondents. The findings showed that low SES students have stronger determination to pursue their studies at tertiary level compared to high SES students. However, both the low and high SES students showed similar trend of perception towards reputation of UKM as well as the undergraduate engineering program. There is no significant difference between the two groups in terms of criteria in selecting university and course program.

Keywords: socio-economic status, matriculation students, university, undergraduate program;

1. Introduction

Every year, the Ministry of Higher Education receives applications from the matriculation, STPM and diploma holders through UPU system to proceed to undergraduate programs. The applicants come from different family backgrounds including parents' socio-economic status (SES). This factor plays a big role and gives substantial impact to the student in their decision to enter Higher Educational Institution (HEI). SES was defined as graded hierarchy of social positions which can be used to describe a person's overall social position or standing. It can be indicated by a number of sub-concepts such as employment status, occupational status, educational attainment, and income and wealth (Graetz, 1995a). According to Stage & Hossler (1989); Choat (1998); Chalmers (2001); and Looker & Lowe (2001), SES is the strongest predictor of tertiary study. The three dimensions of SES were identified as parental education, parental occupation and parental income (Looker and Lowe 2001).

Research has reported that parents' education is an indicator of SES among adolescent in South Africa and Tanzania (Aaro, Flisher, Kaaya, Onya, Namisi and Wubs 2009). Commonly, parents that own knowledge about the tertiary education will provide a better access to information that relate to college for their children (McDonough 1997; Choy, Horn, Nunez and Chen 2000). Parental occupation reflects the SES through the type of occupation such as professional and non-professional. However, there are still a group of parents who are not working due to some reasons like health and economic factors. Vereecken, Maes and Bacquer (2004) reported that parental occupation is able to affect the adolescent lifestyle including food habits and smoking. Parental income has a direct relationship with parental education and occupation. Depending on the level of parental education and type of parental occupation, parental income can be high or low. Parents or family with high or low income react differently to their children education especially when it comes to their beliefs and expectation towards their children. Davis-Kean (2005) found that this matter indirectly affect the children academic achievement.

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2. Literature Review

SES can also be categorised into high SES and low SES according to the position of parents' education, occupation and income. There are differences between high SES student and low SES student. The studies reported that high SES student intends to pursue tertiary education, attends university and pursues post graduate degrees (St John 1991; James 2000; Looker & Lowe 2001). However, low SES students take different direction. James (1999) stated that students from low SES were less presented in HEI. They are less confident and have many things to consider especially on the financial aspects in making decision to enter HEI. Both statuses also affect the student choice of course program in the college or university. High SES students prefer to study engineering and science. While, Davies and Guppy in Leppel et al (2001) found that low SES students tend to choose subjects that can guarantee immediate job prospects upon graduation.

In our country, there are many cases where children are at risk of not getting proper education because of the critical SES. The Ministry of Education reported a socioeconomic gap is one of the factors that influence student's dropout from school. This gap refers to the different health status, discipline quality, student's welfare and poverty (Ministry of Education, 2007). According to Shumow et al (1998), Dodge et.al (1994) and Small and Luster (1994) in Arshat et al (2002), children at risk due to low SES do not perform well at school and have many social and cognitive problems compared to moderate and high SES students.

Hence, this SES factor is capable to give a long term effect in our education system. Therefore, there's a need to observe the SES issue among Malaysian matriculation students in their decision making to enter tertiary education level. There are three objectives for this study:

- a. To identify the high SES and low SES effects on the matriculation students' decision making in entering the HEI
- b. To identify the high SES student and low SES students' perception about the reputation of UKM and engineering programs at UKM.
- c. To distinguish the factors that influencing matriculation students' decision in choosing university and undergraduate program between high SES student and low SES student.

3. Research Methodology

This study applied quantitative method using self-developed questionnaire to collect data. The questionnaire is divided into four parts A) respondent demographic; B) UKM and engineering course reputation; C) students' interest on UKM engineering program and D) factors in choosing university and study program. The sample for this study is 496 matriculation students from two matriculation colleges. They were picked randomly and were given 30 minutes to respond to the questionnaire. The data was processed and analyzed by using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software. Descriptive analysis and independent sample T-test were used to get a comprehensive result base on the research objectives.

4. Result

Through descriptive analysis, the result of the respondents' demographic is shown in Table 1. From 496 respondents, they represented of 177 male students and 319 female students with different background of ethnicity. Majority of them are living in city area (N=211) and went to daily school (N=237). Their academic achievements were reflected by the result of Malaysia Certificate of Education (MCE) in the past year. Around 314 students showed a moderate achievement in the range of 5As to 10As

Table 1. Respondents' demographic

Demographic		Frequency (N)	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	177	35.70
	Female	319	64.30
Ethnic	Malay	435	87.70
	India	16	3.20
	Chinese	42	8.50
	Others	2	0.40
	Living area	City central	58
	City	211	42.50
	Suburb	176	35.50
	Rural area	48	9.70
Type of school	Boarding School	115	23.20
	Daily Boarding School	132	26.60
	Daily School	237	47.80
	Private School	10	2.00
MCE result	> 10A	20	4.00
	5A - 10A	314	63.30
	< 4A	160	32.30

4.1 To identify the high SES and low SES effect on the matriculation student decision making in entering engineering program.

Table 2. Matriculation student's decision in entering engineering program

SES	Yes (%)	No (%)	Not Sure (%)	Missing Values (%)
High SES	47 (28.48)	71 (64.55)	141(71.94)	25 (100.00)
Low SES	118 (71.52)	39 (35.45)	55 (28.06)	
Total	165 (100.00)	110 (100.00)	196 (100.00)	25 (100.00)

Table 2 shows the percentage of student's decision to enter engineering program at HEI between high SES and low SES. From the result, majority of the low SES students (N=118) were interested to pursue engineering studies

and majority of high SES students (N= 141) were not sure about that. Yet, missing value of 25 on the table indicates the number of respondents who did not answer the question due to some reasons.

4.2 To identify the high SES student and low SES student perception of the university and engineering course reputation at UKM.

Table 3. Students perception on UKM reputation and engineering program

PART B	SES	M	SD	Mean difference	t	p	df
Knowing the existence of UKM	High	4.60	0.75	-0.01	-0.11	0.85	479.00
	Low	4.61	0.76				
UKM as a prestigious university	High	4.13	0.81	-0.00	-0.06	0.76	478.00
	Low	4.13	0.81				
UKM research university status	High	3.96	0.96	-0.08	-0.99	0.11	474.00
	Low	4.05	0.87				
UKM's mission to uphold the Malay language	High	3.79	1.13	-0.04	-0.39	0.13	476.00
	Low	3.83	1.04				
UKM offers engineering programs	High	3.96	1.08	-0.08	-0.89	0.03	424.95
	Low	4.04	0.95				
UKM has quality engineering program	High	3.76	0.75	-0.02	-0.22	0.18	474.00
	Low	3.78	0.76				
UKM offers dual-degree program	High	3.22	0.81	0.00	0.01	0.52	474.00
	Low	3.22	0.81				
UKM engineering programs are more difficult	High	3.04	0.96	0.00	0.04	0.12	475.00
	Low	3.04	0.87				

Table 3 shows that students from either high SES or low SES were not significantly different from each other in giving perception towards UKM reputation and engineering program. Yet, the high SES students and low SES students were significantly different in their knowledge about engineering programs offered by the UKM with $t(424.95) = -0.89, p < 0.05$ and the value of mean are slightly difference. Overall, mean and standard deviation value also showed that low SES students have a better perception and knowledge about UKM compared to high SES students.

4.3 To distinguish the factors that influence matriculation student decision in choosing university and course program between high SES student and low SES student.

Table 4. Factors in choosing university and course program

Section A	SES	M	SD	Mean difference	t	P	df
The influence of parents, teachers and family members	High	3.88	1.09	0.04	0.44	0.51	477.00
	Low	3.85	1.08				
Follow friend's selections	High	2.78	1.08	0.07	0.70	0.10	478.00
	Low	2.70	1.17				
Suitability with personality and interest	High	4.16	0.88	0.01	0.14	0.74	477.00
	Low	4.15	0.96				
Information from media	High	3.84	0.88	-0.03	-0.38	0.35	478.00
	Low	3.87	0.95				
Career history	High	3.30	1.08	0.11	1.05	0.02	473.61
	Low	3.18	1.24				
The cost of study and financial support	High	4.08	2.23	0.11	0.73	0.48	478.00
	Low	3.97	1.08				

Again, there were no significant difference between High SES students and low SES students. All of them choose to enter the university and select the course program based on the suitability with personality and interest, $t(477.00) = 0.14, p > 0.05$; the cost of study, financial support, $t(478.00) = 0.73, p > 0.05$ and the information from media, $t(478.00) = -0.38, p > 0.05$. Career history do not really influenced them but it was a significant difference among high SES students and low SES students with $t(473.61) = 1.05, p < 0.05$.

5. Discussion

From the analysis, both groups of students gave significant observations especially in decision making to enter the HEI. The contradict result from both groups reflected that the low SES students had higher determination to pursue their study in engineering rather than high SES students. Regardless of high SES or low SES, the students have very general knowledge about UKM and its engineering courses offered in UKM, as well as factors that influence them in choosing university and its corresponding undergraduate program.

However, some recommendations can be outlined in order to reduce the education gap between the high SES students and the low SES students. Those people should be realistic and responsible to ensure better future for these students. For instance, parents must work hard to improve their families SES so that it will minimize the effect of SES in their children's education. They have to work out on the three-dimensional factors that most influence the SES such as occupation, education level and income. Yet, these sensitive issues are hardly discussed; they have to look into and decide their children future especially on academic matter.

In addition, teachers and counsellors have to work together to identify the lower SES students and offer them guidance to decide suitable university and program. It is found that in educational sociology, the school environment and staffs are capable to influence the student's development and achievement (Ming and Holcombe, 2010; Heck 2007). The government might also need to continue the education scheme for the lower SES students. Based on the

Government Transformation Program (GTP) launched in 2008, education was become one of the main field that will be focussed by the government. Hence, the Ministry of Education is going to implement some proactive actions to make sure low SES students can access better education quality like other countries (Prime Minister Department, 2010)

6. Conclusion

From the findings, it can be concluded that the SES is not an influencing factor of the matriculation students in Malaysia to choose university and study program for their tertiary education. These significant results are inconsistent with previous works conducted in other countries as reported in the literature. Thus, they may lead to more interesting study in the future.

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