



Full Length Research Paper

Self-esteem and English achievement among religious school students

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The study is to identify the relationship between self-esteem and English achievement among students from Government Assisted Religious School (SABK) in Kedah, Malaysia. The sample of this study consists of 173 students from SABK schools in Kedah, Malaysia. The data of self-esteem is collected by using Self-esteem Scale. Self-esteem Scale is developed by Morris Rosenberg consisted of 10 items and has been translated into Malay language version. The data on students' achievement in English is retrieved from Lower Secondary Examination (PMR) conducted by the Ministry of Education, Malaysia. The data is analyzed by using SPSS version 18. The result from Pearson correlation and t-test revealed that there is no significant relationship between self esteem and English achievement.

Keywords: Self-esteem, English achievement, religious school students

INTRODUCTION

Education during the colonial period was dualistic in nature. It was between secular education on the one hand and the traditional on the other hand. This brought about a division not only among Muslims but also among non-Muslims. Racial problem was a major issue, and dual personalities and systems were also prevalent (Azyurmadi, 2004). After independence, Education Act 1961 (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 1988) provided a space for Islamic religious subject to be taught to Muslim students. Traditionally, Islamic religious subjects were taught privately in traditional ways by individuals and groups at non-formal school such as at private schools and mosques. Most of these schools were devised by Muslim scholars and funded by religious authority of the states in the country (Azyurmadi, 2004). Though the emergence of non-formal religious school has a great

impact on psychospiritual development of the students, several important aspects of educational management should not be swept under the carpet. Issues such as school administration, human resources management, students' achievement, teaching and learning development, and school facilities are amongst the important problems that should be reviewed. Study by Zakaria (1995) shows academic performance and the quality of services in these schools are very poor and need to be improvised. The quality of services is referred to school administration, staff management and the quality of teaching and learning. In order to strengthen the quality of school administration, Zakaria held the department of education need to improvise some aspects in human resource management including training to academic and non-academic staff; upgrading teachers'

skills and competencies and the used of technology in teaching and learning. It is undeniable that some elements in science and technology have been integrated in national curriculum programme (Ministry of Education, 1988; Sidek Baba, 2009).

The Ministry of Education has devised a new programme known as "Government Assisted Religious School" (SABK) in order to strengthen the quality of religious schools in Malaysia. In this case, The Ministry of Education and The State Government will collaborately administered SABK schools. The role of The Ministry of Education is to improvise the school administration, human resources management, school facilities and the quality of teaching and learning. The State Government is given an authority to maintain the existed curriculum (i.e Islamic subjects) and also to ensure humanities subjects (i.e science, mathematic, English, history, geography ect.) will be taught along with Islamic subjects (Dangiran, 2008; Department of Education Pahang, 2004; Azizi and Supyan, 2009). The attempts to teach Islamic subjects along with humanities and sciences subjects have marked the bold steps taken by the Ministry of Education to provide integrated approach in education. Malaysian educational policy intends to bridge the gap so that Muslim students could have a strong basic understanding and practice of Islam and at the same time they were prepared to become professionals in their carier (Sidek Baba, 2009; Dangiran, 2008). This is in parallel with the aim of Muslim education as drawn in The First World Conference on Muslim Education in Makkah 1977 (Syed Muhammad Naquib, 1993). The Conference recommended;

"...vigorous and planned efforts should be made to provide free, compulsory and universal education to all children so that they are able to read, write, understand and express the fundamental teachings of Islam and other sciences and arts which may enable them to understand the nature of creation and man's place in the universe as the vicegerent of Allah".

English achievement

In Islamic perspective, education is a form of worship that Muslim share a common set of values based on Quran (the fundamental and most reliable source for many fields of knowledge in Islam) and Sunnah (the tradition of the prophet). Beside Islamic subjects, SABK's student also learn English subject at primary and secondary level. With the emergence of modern technology, English is regarded as an important subject, in particular to understand the knowledge of science and technology (Yew Lie Koo and Hazita, 2010). Though there are efforts from The Ministry of Education, Malaysia (2011) to

enhance English achievement among the SABK students, their result are still low (Yew Lie Koo and Hazita, 2010; Hee Kiew Loo, 2006). The result from Lower Secondary Examination (PMR) in 2011 indicates students who achieved A for English subject is increased from 17.6 (2010) to 18.4 percent (2011). Although the percentage is increased (0.8 percent), the percentage of candidates who are unable to achieve a minimum grade for English is still high, i.e 21.3 percent (Ministry of Education, 2011). This situation implies students' achievement in English is still poor. Many researchers (Jalim, 1999; Dalinah, 1998) urged educators and The Ministry of Education to take a vigorous action and plan serious programs to enhance students' achivement in English subject.

English achievement among SABK students in Lower Secondary Examination (PMR) in 2008 showed 75 percent achieved D grade and 40 percent achieved E grade for English subject (<http://www.smad.bpi.edu.my>). The result depict students' achievement in English subject is weak. Though the SABK schooling system is more focused on Islamic subjects, the importance of English subject as a second language should not be denied (Siti Hamin, Nadzrah and Rozmel, 2007). Many researchers viewed English is the most commonly used language among foreign language speakers. Throughout the world, when people with different languages come together they commonly use English to communicate (Saadiah and Kaladevi, 2009; Hazita, 2004; Ali Akbar & Zahra, 2014). Moreover, in certain subjects in school such as science and mathematic, English terminologies are widely applied. Hazita (2004) stressed that no matter how, the students need to mastery English subject especially at primary and secondary school level. Students who are well-versed in English language were easily enrolled in job market compared to their peers who are unable to communicate well in English (Ali Akbar, 2013; Saadiah and Kaladevi, 2009; Hazita, 2004).

According to several researchers (Sulaiman 1990; Azyurmadi, 2004; Mohd Ismail et.al, 2004; Sidek Baba, 2009), SABK students are weak in English is due to the goal of the school. Since SABK educational orientation is grounded upon Islamic curriculum (such as Islamic creed, worship, moral, Arabic language, jurisprudence, the science of the Qu'ran and so forth), the emphasis on these subjects are priority. This situation is also brought to the dichotomy in curriculum emphasis in which schools run by the government, mathematics and science subjects (and also other humanities subjects) were taught along with Islamic subjects, whereas in SABK schools such subjects were less emphasized or neglected (Sulaiman, 1990). This resulted to a dichotomous nature of human capital involved in nation building. In prior, the aim of parents who sent their children to SABK schools are primarily to ensure their children gained Islamic religious knowledge as much as they can. The parents

also hope that the children can pursue their study in Islamic courses either in Malaysia or in Arabic country. Therefore, English subject is not their concerned (Mohd Yusof et.al, 2005; Mohd Ismail et. al, 2004; Azizi, 2001; Hazita, 2004).

Self-esteem

Self-esteem is one of the most commonly research concepts in social psychology. Many early theories suggested that self-esteem is a basic human need or motivation (Santrock, 2011). Teachers, administrators and parents are commonly concerned about student's self-esteem. Self-esteem is also associated with depression, anxiety, motivation and general satisfaction with one's life (Harter, 1986; Rosenberg, 1986). Given these associations, children and adolescents who lack of self-esteem may be more dependent on their parents and have lower academic and vocational goals. In addition, the belief is widespread that raising a child's self-esteem would be beneficial for both the individual and society as a whole. Self-esteem can be defined as an individual's attitude about him or herself, involving self-evaluation along a positive and negative dimension (Santrock, 2011; Rosenberg, Carmi, & Carrie, 1995). It is composed of two distinct dimensions, competence and worth. The competence dimension (efficacy based self-esteem) refers to the degree to which people see themselves as capable and efficacious. The worth dimension (worth based self-esteem) refers to the degree to which individuals feel they are the persons to be valued. Different studies have reached the conclusion that self-esteem and academic achievement are positively correlated (Bankston and Zhou, 2002; Lockett and Harrell, 2003).

Self-esteem has always played a crucial role in learning language, especially in English subject (Ali Akbar & Zahra, 2014). Many studies have been done to investigate the relationship between self-esteem and English language. Study conducted by Carr *et al.* (1991) found self-esteem to be a significant predictor of reading awareness as pupils with higher self-esteem were more able to read and reading compared to those with lower self-esteem. They had used pre-and-post-test, and found greater score among those with higher self-esteem. Grodnick (1996) examined the correlation between self-esteem and writing through fifty compositions of Union County College students. He used Coppersmith self-esteem Scale and writing course grades to determine the correlation. The outcome of this study supported the hypothesis that students' self-esteem level did not show a significant correlation with proficiency level of writing. Study by Hassan (2001) showed that writing apprehension of EFL students in Iran is negatively correlated with self-esteem. The study revealed low

apprehensive students had higher self-esteem and high apprehensive students had lower self-esteem. Wilson et al. (1980) investigated twelve studies related to writing apprehension, self-esteem and personal characteristics. Self-esteem and personality were examined and the outcome of the studies showed that apprehension and anxiety were inversely related to self-esteem. When self-esteem increased, writing apprehension and anxiety decreased; and when self-esteem decreased, writing apprehension and anxiety increased.

OBJECTIVE

The objective of this study is to identify the correlation between self-esteem and English achievement; and the correlation between self-esteem and gender.

METHODOLOGY

Sampel of this study is 173 form four SABK students (88 male and 85 female). Rosenberg self-esteem scale is used in this study that consisted of ten questions. The instrument of self-esteem has been translated into Malay language. The translated version has been verified by experts in Malay and English language. In order to identify the consistency of the instrument, pilot test has been carried out to 30 students. The result of alpha cronbach is 0.75. Pearson correlation and t-test were used to analyse the data.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1 shows English achievement has a low correlation with self-esteem ($r = -.052$). The score for $p = 0.495$, which is above the significant level ($p < .05$). Thus, there is no significant relationship between self-esteem and English achievement.

Table 2 is a correlation analysis between self-esteem and gender. The result shows the score for t-test is $t = 2.368$, $df = 171$, $p = 0.019$. There is a significant relationship between self-esteem and students' gender. The finding also indicates female students have high self-esteem than the male students (min difference = .8656).

The main finding of the study shows there is no significant relationship between self-esteem and English achievement. The current study suggests that self-esteem might not be a good indicator to achieve a good result in English subject. This finding is in parallel with the previous studies (Habibollah, Rohani, H. Tengku Aizan & Jamaluddin, 2009; Emamzadeh, 2004). As we speculated, the present study demonstrates the girls have higher self-esteem compared to the boys (min difference = .8656). The finding is in consistent with other

Table 1: Correlation analysis between self-esteem and English achievement

English Achievement	Esteem	
English Achievement	Pearson Correlation	1
N	Sig. (2-tail)	-.052
	173	.495

Table 2: Correlation analysis between self-esteem and gender

Independent sample	Min diff. (girls-boys)	N	S.P	t	df	P
Self-esteem						
Gender	.8656	173	.8194	2.368	171	.019

studies (Dornbusch et al., 1987; Zalizan et.al 2005; Ministry of Education, Malaysia, 2000; Sar Abadani Tafreshi, 2006; Vishalakshi and Yeshodhara, 2012; and Habibollah, Rohani, Tengku Aizan and Jamaluddin, 2009; Eccles, 2002).

This study has important implications for SABK's students. Though self-esteem has no significant relationship with English achievement, it is regarded as a main motivational factor in academic performance (Pullmann & Allik, 2008; Zalizan et.al, 2005). Other study also supported that individuals with higher self-esteem have been found to engage in more beneficial problem focused coping such as active coping and planning than individuals with lower self-esteem (Griva & Anagnostopoulus, 2010; Lo, 2002; Smith & Dust, 2005; Ali Akbar & Zahra, 2014). Low self-esteem, on the other hand, does not necessarily depict a poor academic achievement. Research by Pullmann & Allik (2008) showed that low self-esteem is a significant predictor of superior school performance.

From the study, we opined that pedagogical techniques such as teaching and learning strategies, learning environment and learning tools should be improvised. School can creates appropriate learning environment by providing more reading materials to the students, optimizing the used of media and technology in teaching and learning, and designs creative activities to encourage students and also staffs to communicate in English language. Prior to that, peer study is significant in stimulating self-esteem, self-confidence and strengthening students' communication skills. Students are more likely to share ideas and problems to their peer friends than parents or teachers. Thus, teachers can played their roles in developing active peer group

discussion in classrooms. Ali Akbar & Zahra (2014) recommended several pedagogical strategies in enhancing students' achievement in English language (EFL). Both researchers believed that positive learning environment and creativities in teaching and learning are amongst the factors that should be reviewed by the teachers.

Gender is generally asserted to impact upon the growth, demonstration and manifestation of self-esteem. Studies (Dornbusch et al., 1987; Tinku and Biswas, 1994; Eccles, 2002; Shobhna Joshi and Rekha Srivastava, 2009) reported that female students tended to get higher grades than boys. According to Zalizan et al., (2005) and Ministry of Education, Malaysia (2000) female students are more capable in time management, well-plan in their study and having higher self-esteem compared to male students. Given these situations, we viewed motivation in school is inevitable. This is because motivation is regarded as the main tool in strengthening students' self-esteem and increasing students' psychological well-being (Rahil et. al., 2006; Fathman, 1986). Despite motivation, parents should played significant role to devise their own strategic approaches in enhancing students' self-esteem and their academic achievement at home. At the same time, parents should believe that curriculum designed for SABK School is purposely to educate students' competencies and to nurture their potentials physically and psychologically. Rosenberg (1965) opined that students who believed that their parents lacked interest in them had much lower levels of self-esteem. Again, parental involvement as is the case of teacher's involvement could account for the disparity in low and high performers. Scarr and Thompson (1994) offered the perspective that children's academic and social

competence can be predicted mainly by their family background, parents' psychological support and the most influential being other sources of support.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, although self-esteem has no significant correlation with English achievement, we believed that self-esteem played an important role in students' academic achievement. High level of self-esteem brings a high level of confidence, problem solving abilities and assertiveness and thus, elevates students' academic achievement. The finding of this study revealed that pedagogical strategies should be reviewed especially at SABK School. This means teachers who taught English subject should be trained to apply appropriate pedagogical approach to this group of students. In fact, it is utmost significance if self-esteem could be inculcated across the entire curriculum. School authorities should work out guidelines as well as develop program that help students to cope with low self-esteem. By this program, it is hoped that students are able to overcome their negative feelings and involve actively in learning especially in English subject. Also, school authorities and all stakeholders in education must help students to appreciate the connection between self-esteem and academic performance by initiating programs that help to grasp and subdue challenges.

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