

The Attitudes of Students and their Parents towards Vocational Education

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ABSTRAK

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk menentukan sikap pelajar dan ibu bapa mereka terhadap pendidikan vokasional. Satu sampel yang terdiri daripada 120 orang pelajar dipilih dari lima buah sekolah dalam daerah Rembau, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia. Tiga daripada sekolah-sekolah tersebut adalah sekolah menengah vokasional dan dua buah lagi adalah sekolah menengah akademik. Pelajar-pelajar tersebut dan juga ibu bapa mereka ditemubual dan sikap mereka terhadap pendidikan vokasional diukur dengan menggunakan skala jenis Likert. Lima belas pernyataan tentang pendidikan vokasional dikemukakan kepada setiap subjek, dan darjah persetujuan masing-masing atau sebaliknya dirakamkan. Didapati bahawa pelajar-pelajar dari sekolah menengah akademik dan sekolah menengah vokasional serta juga ibu bapa mereka mempunyai sikap yang positif terhadap pendidikan vokasional.

ABSTRACT

This study aims to determine the attitudes of students and their parents towards vocational education. A sample of 120 students were selected from five schools in the district of Rembau, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia. Three of the schools were vocational secondary schools and the remaining two were academic schools. The students and their respective parents were interviewed and their attitudes towards vocational education was measured using a Likert-type scale. Fifteen attitude statements pertaining to vocational education were posed to the subjects and their agreement or disagreement was recorded. It was found that the students and their parents had positive attitudes towards vocational education.

INTRODUCTION

The importance of vocational education as a part of, and supplementary to general education has been increasingly accepted. There is currently a growing awareness that besides fostering individual growth and development through the process of education, the school should also accept the function of developing human resources to cater to national economic needs. The education system should also include a component which links the school and the

world of work and hence facilitates the students in their entry into the labour market.

The International Labour Office in its Vocational Training Recommendations 1939 proposed that education should include a preparation for developing an idea of, taste for, and esteem for manual work; these being an indispensable part of general education. Since the adoption of the recommendation the technical content of the school curriculum at the secon-

dary level has tended to increase in many countries (ILO: p. 9).

Work by Evans (1972) indicated that the students who were enrolled in vocational classes gained experience which gave them great satisfaction. The parents, on the other hand, tended to react negatively towards vocational education. They appeared to have questions about their own feelings themselves and expressed the need for more information on vocational education. Owen and Vinarsky (1983) reported that the parents of the students enrolled in vocational programmes noticed improvements in certain areas of their children's performance. The greatest improvement reported was in doing work that met acceptable standards and in being willing to learn new things.

An important criterion which has a strong influence on the public attitude towards vocational education is the extent the graduates of the vocational schools are successful in getting jobs in their skilled areas. Lourdesamy (1972) pointed out that the majority of the vocational school graduates in Malaysia were unemployed and most of those employed were found to be working in areas not related to their trade specialities.

In Malaysia, skilled workers are generally associated with doing jobs with hands and not with brains. It is this belief that leads many people to regard those who do skilled types of jobs as having an inferior mental capability. Wong (1977) commented that some parents still have the notion that an academic education is the best for their children even though the employment opportunities for school leavers equipped with only an academic qualification are becoming fewer while more and more opportunities are being opened to school leavers who have a technical education. Such parents are guided by the fallacy that a job which does not soil one's hands is better than one which does.

THE PROBLEM

While there is an expressed need for skilled workers in Malaysia, there is apparently a

reluctance among the Malaysians to choose and prepare themselves for skilled or blue-collar jobs.

Traditionally, skilled workers were produced through apprenticeship and the "pick-up" methods of acquiring skills. These methods, however, can no longer cater for the growing need for these workers. Vocational education, as provided at the upper secondary level in vocational schools on a full-time basis, is seen as a workable system which can produce such workers. Hence, the building of more such schools is included in the development plans of Malaysia.

It is important, therefore, to know whether vocational education is well-received by the public in general and the students and their parents in particular before a great amount of government funds are expended in the construction of these schools. This study attempts to examine the attitudes of the students and their parents towards vocational education.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Objectives of the Study

The study tries to achieve the following objectives:

1. To assess the attitudes of the students and their parents towards vocational education.
2. To determine whether there are differences in the attitudes towards vocational education between the academic school students and the vocational school students.
3. To determine whether there are differences in the attitudes towards vocational education between the parents of the academic school students and the parents of the vocational school students.

Research Procedure

This study was conducted at five schools in the state of Negeri Sembilan; three schools were vocational schools and the rest were academic schools. In the plan of this study, it was intended that the students in all the vocational areas be

included. Only two states — Negeri Sembilan and Pahang — offer the full areas of vocational education, namely Agricultural Science, Industrial and Trades, Commercial Studies and Home Science. The state of Pahang was not selected because the vocational schools in this state were located far apart. In order to enable this study to be conducted within the allocated budget and yet cover all the vocational areas, it was decided to conduct the study in the state of Negeri Sembilan. The three vocational schools selected offer all courses in the four vocational areas and the distances between the schools were less than 25 kilometers.

The population under study consisted of Form Four students enrolled in the five selected schools in Negeri Sembilan in 1984 and their parents. Proportional stratified random sampling was used to get a representative sample of the Form Four students according to their enrollments in the five selected schools. The desired sample size was 120 students — 60 students from the academic schools and 60 students from the vocational schools — and 120 of their respective parents.

The findings and generalizations of this study are limited to the population under study. However, as the education system is centrally administered using a common syllabus, the findings of this study may be generalizable to other vocational schools in the state of Negeri Sembilan. Since the students enrolled in the vocational schools in the state of Negeri Sembilan came from the states of Johore, Malacca and Selangor, the findings concerning the students' parents may be generalizable to the parents in those states.

The measuring instruments used in this study were two interview schedules developed by the researcher — one interview schedule for the students and another for the parents. The attitude towards vocational education was measured by a Likert-type scale whereby attitude statements towards vocational education were posed to the subjects. They were asked to state whether they agreed, disagreed or were uncertain about the statements. A score of 3 was given if a subject

agreed with a statement, 2 if the subject was uncertain and 1 if he/she disagreed with the statement. The scoring was reversed for negatively worded statements.

The content validity of the Interview Schedules was evaluated by the lecturers in the Faculty of Educational Studies, University of Agriculture, Malaysia. As a result of the critiques by the faculty members, the number of the attitude statements was reduced from 42 to 24 statements. A pilot study was conducted to test the Interview Schedule for appropriateness and smooth sequencing of questions. From the pilot study, differentiating attitude statements were obtained using the criterion of internal consistency method (Fishbein, 1967). The number of attitude statements were further reduced from 24 to 15 statements (Appendix I).

The reliability coefficients of the Interview Schedule were evaluated using the split-half method. The reliability coefficients of the Interview Schedules used for interviewing the students and their parents were 0.64 and 0.65 respectively.

The students were interviewed during the months of October and November, 1984, i.e. during the third session of the school calendar. As the students sat for their examinations during the month of November, an assistant was hired so as to complete the interviewing in time. The assistant was given training on the proper techniques of interviewing and was closely supervised by the researchers.

The students were interviewed privately, at the end of which their home addresses were requested. They were also asked to sketch a map to their homes and to inform their parents about this study and the impending visits by the researchers to interview their parents. All the subjects in the study sample were interviewed.

Data Analyses

The responses from the students and their parents were arranged in frequency and cumulative frequency distributions. The median and

the semiinterquartile range were used to describe and compare the responses while the median test was used to test for significance. Frequency polygons were constructed to illustrate the distribution of the responses.

DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows the frequencies, cumulative frequencies and percentages of the attitude scores towards vocational education of the academic school students and the vocational school students. Based on an attitude scale with a score of 15 as the minimum and a score of 45 as the maximum, both the academic and the vocational school students indicated moderately positive attitudes towards vocational education. The median attitude score for all students from both types of school was 38.7. The semiinterquartile range was 2.6

The vocational school students had a higher median attitude score which was 39.8 compared to the median attitude score of 37.3 for the academic school students. The distribution of the attitude scores of the vocational school

students was more uniform as indicated by its semiinterquartile range of 1.7 compared to the semiinterquartile range of the academic school students which was 3.7.

The above findings are consistent with the opinions put forth by Bakhtiar Mansor (1981) who suggested that students were beginning to be more receptive to vocational education as reflected in the significant increase in the enrollment of students in the Malaysian vocational schools.

Table 2 shows the frequencies of the academic school and the vocational school students above and below the median attitude score of all students in both types of school. The median test indicates that there is a significant difference at 0.05 probability level. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected. This means that there is a significant difference at 0.05 level between the attitude scores of the academic school students and the vocational school students towards vocational education. The students from the vocational schools were slightly more positive than the students from the academic

TABLE 1
Frequencies, cumulative frequencies and percentages of students
in their attitude scores towards vocational education

Attitude scores	Academic school students			Vocational school students			Total	
	f	c.f.	%	f	c.f.	%	f	c.f.
44-45	2	60	3.3	4	60	6.7	6	120
42-43	6	58	10.0	10	56	16.6	16	114
40-41	7	52	11.7	19	46	31.7	26	98
38-39	14	45	23.3	17	27	28.3	31	72
36-37	8	31	13.3	4	10	6.7	12	41
34-35	13	23	21.7	4	6	6.7	17	29
32-33	5	10	8.3	2	2	3.3	7	12
30-31	1	5	1.7	—	—	—	1	5
28-29	3	4	5.0	—	—	—	3	4
26-27	1	1	1.7	—	—	—	1	1
Median		37.3			39.8			38.7
Semiinterquartile range		3.7			1.7			2.6

TABLE 2
Frequencies of students above and below the median score
of their attitudes towards vocational education

Frequencies above or below median	Academic school students	Vocational school students	Total
Frequency of students above the median score	23	44	67*
Frequency of students below the median score	37	16	53*
Total	60	60	120

$X^2 = 11.94, p < 0.05$

*There were seven tied scores at the median and they were grouped as 'above the median scores'.

schools in their attitude towards vocational education.

Figure 1 shows the relative frequency polygon of the attitude scores of the academic school students and the vocational school students. The distribution of the vocational school students' attitude scores was more leptokurtic than the distribution of the academic school students' attitude scores which was bimodal. The academic school students' attitude scores also showed lower minimum scores compared to those of the vocational school students but both had a maximum score of 45.

Table 3 shows the frequencies, cumulative frequencies and percentages of the parents of both the academic school and the vocational school students regarding their scores of attitudes towards vocational education. The median attitude scores for all parents of the students from both types of school was 36.8. The semi-interquartile range was 2.5.

The median attitude score of the parents of the academic school students was 37.0 and the semiinterquartile range was 2.8. The median attitude score of the parents of the vocational school students was 36.7 and the semiinterquartile range was 2.7. The median test indicates that there is no significant difference at 0.05 level between the median attitude scores of the parents of the academic school and the parents of the vocational school students. Hence, the null hypothesis of no difference between the

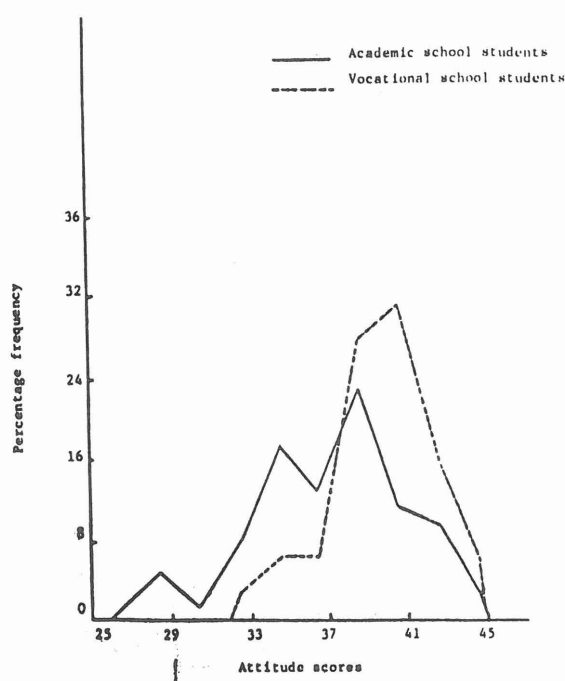


Fig. 1: Relative frequency polygon of attitude scores towards vocational education of the academic school students and the vocational school students

parents of the academic school students and the parents of the vocational school students in terms of their attitude scores towards vocational education is retained.

The above finding indicates that generally parents have positive attitudes towards vocational education which is contrary to the popular

TABLE 3
Frequencies, cumulative frequencies and percentages of parents in their attitude scores towards vocational education

Attitude scores	Parents of the academic school students			Parents of the vocational school students			Total	
	f	c.f.	%	f	c.f.	%	f	c.f.
44 - 45	2	60	3.3	1	60	1.7	3	120
42 - 43	1	58	1.7	7	59	11.7	8	117
40 - 41	8	57	13.3	9	52	15.0	17	109
38 - 39	16	49	26.6	8	43	13.3	24	92
36 - 37	11	33	18.3	13	35	21.6	24	68
34 - 35	7	22	11.7	16	22	26.6	23	44
32 - 33	9	15	15.0	4	6	6.7	13	21
30 - 31	4	6	6.7	1	2	1.7	5	8
28 - 29	1	2	1.7	—	—	—	1	3
26 - 27	1	1	1.7	—	—	—	2	2
Median		37.0			36.7			36.8
Semiinterquartile range		2.8			2.7			2.5

belief that the parents and the public have low or negative attitudes towards vocational education as stipulated by Wong (1977) and Mohd. Nor Ghani (1981).

Figure 2 shows the relative frequency polygon of the attitude scores of the parents of the academic school students and the parents of the vocational school students. It can be seen that the mode or the highest percentage frequency of the attitude scores of the parents of both types of students, that is 26.6 percent of the sample, is located at the 38 - 39 score interval for the parents of the academic school students and at 34 - 35 score interval for the parents of the vocational school students.

CONCLUSION

The finding that the attitude of the academic school and the vocational school students was positive towards vocational education contradicts the generally held opinions that the students, especially from the academic schools, have low opinions towards vocational education.

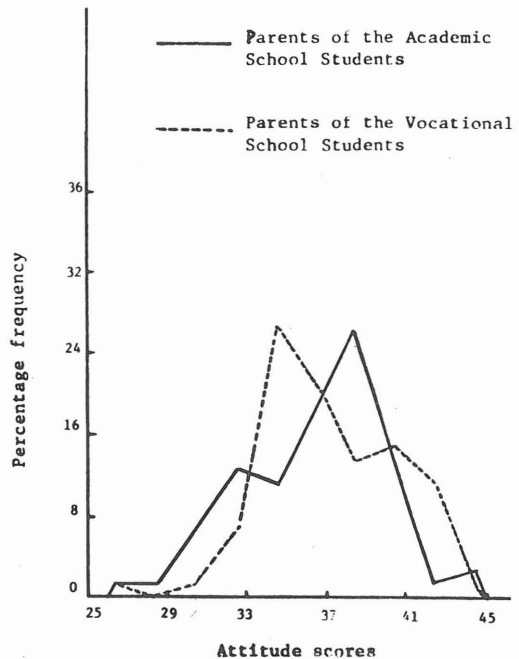


Fig. 2: Relative frequency polygon of the attitude scores of the parents of the academic school students and the parents of the vocational school students

Generally, students are beginning to be more receptive to vocational education.

Another interesting finding from this study is that the difference in the attitude scores between the academic school and the vocational school students was small even though it was statistically significant. If an attitude was formed through the learning process and that it was a product of experience (Halloran, 1970; Lemon, 1973) one would, therefore, expect that after being exposed to vocational education for two school terms, the vocational school students should have much higher, or conversely much lower attitude scores towards vocational education as compared to those of the academic school students. Assuming that their attitude towards vocational education was the same when they entered Form 4, the initial exposure at the vocational schools appeared to be insufficient to effect changes in the students' attitude towards vocational education. This may imply that besides teaching skills, vocational teacher should also attempt to describe work situations or job prospects in which these skills can be put to use.

The parents of the students from both the academic and the vocational schools also showed that they had a positive attitude towards vocational education. Although their median attitude scores differed, this difference was too small to be statistically significant. This may mean that there is a general acceptance for vocational education among the parents. The writer observed that many families had some of their children attending the academic schools while others attending the vocation schools. It may also mean, as explained by Datuk Abd. Rahman Arshad (1984) that the parents choose vocational schools not for the sake of preparing their children for a vocation but because vocational education provided their children another route and opportunity for continuing with their education.

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ATTITUDE STATEMENTS

I am going to read a few statements about vocational education. You are requested to state whether you agree, disagree or are undecided about the statements.

Before you state whether you agree, disagree or are undecided, please make sure that you understand the statements. If you are not clear about any of the statements, please ask me to repeat it.

	SA	UD	DA
1. The skills acquired by the vocational school students are not enough for them to become self-employed.	—	—	—
2. You would not object if a member of your family wished to enroll in a vocational school.	—	—	—
3. Studying in a vocational school is useful, for example a person can repair his/her household appliances or assemble newly bought implements.	—	—	—
4. Vocational schools provide basic skills about jobs.	—	—	—
5. Vocational schools provide information about jobs.	—	—	—
6. A lot of time is being spent doing practical work in the vocational schools such that the students have little time for games and other cocurricular activities.	—	—	—
7. University degrees provide better guarantee of a person's future as compared to skills acquired through vocational schools.	—	—	—
8. Besides providing skills, vocational schools also prepare students to become responsible citizens.	—	—	—
9. The Malaysian society has high regards towards jobs such as carpenters, tailors, mechanics, or electricians.	—	—	—
10. As Malaysia is fast developing, she requires many more vocational schools.	—	—	—
11. Vocational school students have sufficient skills to enable them to work in industries.	—	—	—
12. Skills provided by the vocational schools are no longer needed by industries.	—	—	—
13. Although vocational school students have skills which are related to jobs, they have difficulties in getting jobs.	—	—	—
14. Students have the opportunities to further their studies at the universities through vocational education.	—	—	—
15. Wages received by vocational school leavers commensurate with the kinds of work they do.	—	—	—