

FACTORS INFLUENCING PUPILS' DECISION TO CHOOSE ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS SECONDARY SCHOOLS (SMA): A STUDY AMONG STANDARD SIX PUPILS

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ABSTRACT

This paper was conducted to examine the factors that contributed to pupils' to choose Islamic religious secondary schools (SMA) in Dungun, Terengganu. The respondents of this study were standard six pupils in Dungun, Terengganu. A total of 114 pupils who were sampled from three primary schools in Dungun participated in the survey. A set of questionnaires was distributed to respondents as the instrument of the study. The results of the study revealed that the factors contributed to pupils' decision to choose Islamic religious secondary schools (SMA) are Islamic educational learning and parents' choice. It is also found that there is no association between school governance, peers influence, school location and pupils' decision to choose Islamic religious secondary school.

Key words: Education, Islamic Religious Secondary School, Parents' Choice, Islamic Educational Learning.

Introduction

Education has been an important medium and the main principle for a better future. Every country is trying to improve their education standard including Malaysia. The history of education in Malaysia began with *sekolah pondok* (literally hut school), *madrasah* and other Islamic schools which were the earliest forms of schooling. It is believed that in early works of Malay literature such as Hikayat Abdullah, these schools were mentioned indicating their presence before the current secular model of education.

Secular schools in Malaysia were introduced by the British Colonial Government. Many of the earliest schools were founded in Penang, Malacca and Singapore. The oldest English-language school in Malaya is Penang Free school which was founded in 1816. Most of these English-language schools were considered relatively prestigious. However, 13 years after independence, in 1970s, in accordance to the language policy, the government began to change English medium primary and secondary national type schools into Malay-medium national schools.

At present, education in Malaysia is monitored by the Ministry of Education at different levels of schooling such as pre-school, primary school, secondary school, post-secondary school and university. Although education is the responsibility of the federal government, each state in Malaysia has an education department to coordinate educational matters in their territory.

Other than national schools, there are other types of schools in Malaysia, such as Islamic Religious School, Chinese Independent High Schools and International Schools. Islamic Religious School (SAR) has both primary school and secondary school which are called *Sekolah Rendah Agama* (SRA) and *Sekolah Menengah Agama* (SMA) respectively. The schools teach Muslim students early history of Islam, Arabic language and fiqh. Most of Islamic religious schools are funded by respective states and managed by the state religious authority. For example, Islamic religious school in Terengganu is managed by *Majlis Agama Islam Dan Adat Melayu Terengganu* (MAIDAM). The education department in *Majlis Agama Islam Dan Adat Melayu Terengganu* (MAIDAM) is managing ten Islamic Religious Secondary schools and funding some *madrasahs* and *sekolah pondoks*.

Problem Statement

Education is very important in our lives. In order to produce a knowledgeable generation, our government has provided various schools, institutions and universities. Malaysians have been served with multiple choices in continuing their studies from pre-school until university level. Other than pre-school or primary school level, secondary school level is the most important and crucial stage in children's education. Secondary school is a dominant factor in producing excellent people in the future. As parents or as students themselves, they will surely try to choose the best education at secondary level.

Secondary schools education system in Malaysia is divided into a few types. The most common type that Muslim students enrol in is the National Secondary Schools (SMK). The type of school is managed by the state religious authority. For Muslim families, they have options whether to send their children to *Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan* (SMK) or *Sekolah Menengah Agama* (SMA). As for the *Majlis Agama Islam dan Adat Melayu Terengganu* (MAIDAM) that manages ten Islamic Religious Secondary School, it is crucial for the them to know the factors behind pupils' decision to go to National Secondary School or

Islamic Religious School. Factors that influence their decision to choose Islamic have to be identified. *Majlis Agama Islam dan Adat Melayu Terengganu* (MAIDAM) especially its education department will have a clear picture on pupils' needs and preferences.

Research Objective

1. To investigate the factors that influence pupils to choose Islamic Religious Secondary Schools (SMA).
2. To identify the most to biggest factor that influence pupils to choose Islamic Religious Secondary Schools (SMA).

The Significance of the Study

The study of pupils' decision to choose between *Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan* (SMK) or *Sekolah Menengah Agama* (SMA) will provide information to *Majlis Agama Islam dan Adat Melayu Terengganu* (MAIDAM) on the basis of pupils' decision to continue study in secondary school. This will help them in understanding the nature of pupils' decision and know the reasons why a pupil would choose SMA. This will help them to do any improvement if needed.

Literature Review

In a study done by Eng (1998), it was found that parents prefer Islamic secondary private schools in Kulim. The major areas of investigation included family characteristics and parents' attitude and satisfaction toward private school. Islamic teaching, strict rules of discipline and hardworking teachers were variables that contributed strongly to the parents' attitude and level of satisfaction. It was also found that demographic traits such as father's monthly income, mother's working status, household income, financial burden and distance of home from school had an impact on parental attitude and satisfaction.

Based on Figlio (1997), in his study found that private schools which included religious and non-religious education have more advantages compared to public schools. Parents felt that private religious schools relatively offer more religious education than that in public schools. Private schools offer a more disciplined and probably more secured learning environment, and also offer more meaningful participation in extracurricular activities. It also showed that private religious schools are more likely to be preferred by high-socioeconomic families.

Lankford (1992) in his study found that parents are sensitive to the relative quality of school offerings, the tuition classes provided at religious schools, characteristics of other students and socioeconomic characteristics of the family. The empirical findings contribute to the understanding of the existing school choices and provide insights concerning new school choice proposals. This similar finding was also found by Nor Faizah (2006) who stated that family also influenced students' decision in choosing to study in SMA.

The research result in a study by Asdullah (2007) did not reveal any different in test scores between religious and secular schools when selection into secondary school was taken into account. However, there was a significant learning deficit by gender and primary school type: girls and graduates of primary *madrasahs* have significantly lower test scores.

Methodology

Population

The population in this study consists standard 6 primary school pupils in Dungun, Terengganu who took the Primary School Evaluation Test (UPSR). Three schools were chosen covering the population of urban and rural areas with a total of 340 students.

Sampling Technique and Sample Size

Non-probability sampling which is convenient sampling is used in this study as the total population are unknown (Sekaran, 2006). By using the simple random sampling technique, a total number of 114 respondents were included as a sample in this study.

Data Collection Method

The present study employed a survey design which is a questionnaire with 2 sections

Section 1: Demographic profile

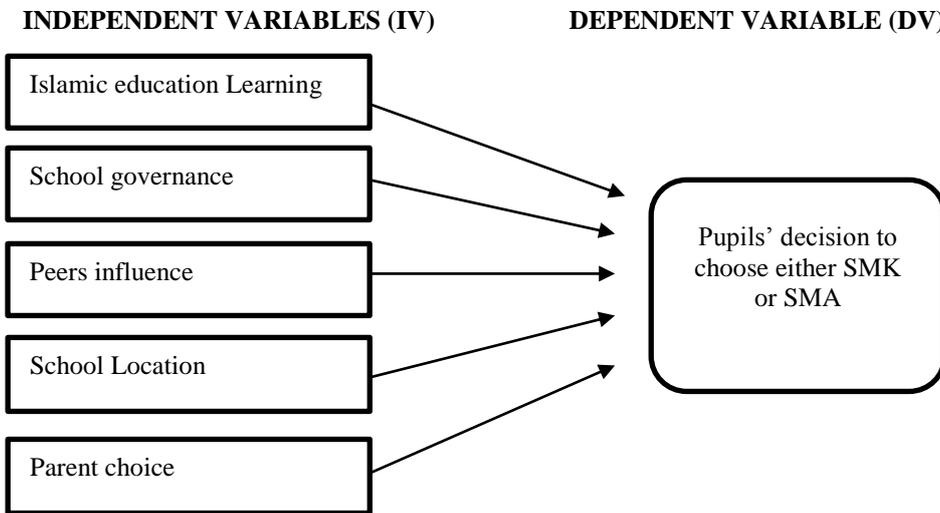
Section 2: The contributing factors towards preferable secondary school.

The questionnaires were distributed to all pupils of *Sekolah Kebangsaan Sura*, *Sekolah Kebangsaan Kuala Abang*, *Sekolah Kebangsaan Kampung Baru* in Dungun, Terengganu. Data was collected using questionnaires and further analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS).

Research Framework

The theoretical framework as shown below:

Figure 1.0: The relationship between independent variables and dependent variable.



Hypothesis Testing

H1: There is a positive relationship between the factors that influence pupils to choose Islamic Religious Secondary Schools (SMA).

H2: There is a positive relationship between the Islamic learning that influence pupils to choose Islamic Religious Secondary Schools (SMA).

Findings

Analysis of the respondents' profile

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Pupils

Variables	Frequency	Percentages (%)
Gender		
Male	40	35.1
Female	74	64.9
State of Birth		
Terengganu	89	78.1
Outside Terengganu	25	21.9
School Area		
Rural	36	31.6
Urban	78	68.4

Table 1 shows the demographic profile of pupils. Out of 114 pupils, 35.1% were male and the rest were female. In terms of school area, 31.6% of the pupils' were from rural area and 68.4% from urban area. Majority of the respondents were born in Terengganu (78.1%).

Table 2: Pupils Decision between National Secondary School (SMK) and Islamic Religious Secondary School (SMA) in Dungun

	Frequency	Percent (%)
National Secondary School (SMK School)	67	58.8
Islamic Religious Secondary School (SMA School)	47	41.2
Total	114	100.0

Table 2 shows the respondents preference to choose National Secondary School (SMK)(58.8%) rather than Islamic Religious Secondary School (41.2%).

Regression

Table 3: Regression between the independent variables and dependent variables

Variables	B	S.E.	Wald	Sig.	Exp(B)
School governance	-.226	.278	.665	.415	.797
Peers influence	-.046	.109	.176	.675	.955
Parents' choice	.258	.108	5.697	.017	1.294
School location	-.138	.081	2.853	.091	.871
Islamic education learning	.480	.199	5.836	.016	1.615
Constant	-2.994	2.220	1.818	.178	.050

Table 3 shows the result of positive factors that influence pupils to choose SMA. Based on the finding, only Islamic education learning and parents' choice factors contributed significantly to pupils' decision. **Therefore, H1 is rejected because not all factors influence pupils' to choose SMA.**

By looking at the odd ratio, the value of Islamic education learning factor is 1.62. This implies that the respondents who preferred Islamic education learning were about two times more likely to choose Islamic Religious Secondary School. **Therefore H2 is accepted where the "Islamic education learning" is the biggest factor that influence pupils to choose SMA.**

Conclusion

Based on the first objective, which is to identify the significant factor that influenced pupils' decision to choose SMK or SMA, it can be concluded that only Islamic educational learning and parents' choice contributed to the pupils' decision. The finding supports the study done by Nor Faizah (2006) which indicated that family was a strong factor for the students to choose SMA as their secondary schools.

According to Eng (1998), school governance such as Islamic teaching, strict rules of discipline and hardworking teachers were the variables that exerted influence on parental attitude and satisfaction on Islamic schooling. However, this study fails to prove that school governance influences pupils' decision.

In short, MAIDAM should put more effort and commitment to create awareness among the public especially the parents. Its education department needs to find a solution in order to attract more pupils to be interested in Islamic Religious Secondary School (SMA) such as doing some promotions to promote their school or holding educational or non-educational activities with primary school students. It is hoped that by doing so, pupils choose Islamic Religious Secondary School because of their own willingness. The schools should also play their role in promoting Islamic Religious secondary school to be the best option for the pupils.

Future Research

A study can be done by involving more target population from other districts in Terengganu so that the generalization of this study can be widened. Thus the finding might be different. Besides that, the finding shows that pupils choose Islamic Religious Secondary School (SMA) because their parents choose for them but the pupils are also attracted with Islamic educational learning. A further study should also be done involving Islamic Religious Secondary School students in order to know the factors that influence their decision in choosing their current school.

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