CHILDREN'S ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOURS TOWARD AT-HOME LEARNING: A CASE STUDY AT CHILDREN'S HOME TAIPING

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Abstract: This study aims to identify learning attitudes and behaviours among children living at Children's Home Taiping. The study sample consists of 39 children residing at Children's Home Taiping. The study uses structured interviews to gather data from the respondents regarding their attitudes and behaviours toward at-home learning. The results indicate that most of the children accommodated in Children's Home Taiping display negative attitudes and behaviours toward various aspects of learning. Absence of parental support and the social environment of the children's home itself negatively impact the children's development of educational aspirations and ability to self-manage their at-home learning.

Keywords: children, attitude, behaviour, learning

Abstrak: Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengenal pasti sikap dan tingkah laku pembelajaran dalam kalangan kanak-kanak yang ditempatkan di Rumah Kanak-Kanak Taiping. Seramai 39 orang kanak-kanak yang ditempatkan di Rumah Kanak-Kanak Taiping ini dipilih sebagai responden kajian. Kajian ini menggunakan temu bual berstruktur untuk mendapatkan data daripada responden berkaitan sikap dan tingkah laku pembelajaran mereka di rumah kanak-kanak ini. Hasil kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa kebanyakan kanak-kanak yang ditempatkan di Rumah Kanak-Kanak Taiping memaparkan sikap dan tingkah laku yang negatif dalam pelbagai aspek pembelajaran. Ketiadaan sokongan ibu bapa dan persekitaran sosial rumah kanak-kanak itu sendiri memberi kesan negatif ke atas aspirasi dan pengurusan diri kanak-kanak ini dalam aspek pembelajaran di rumah kanak-kanak.

Kata kunci: kanak-kanak, sikap, tingkah laku, pembelajaran

INTRODUCTION

In a developing nation such as Malaysia, the government makes education a top priority (Ling, 1983) because of its potential to brighten the lives of future generations (Khadijah, 1989/90). Education is the process by which a society transmits knowledge, values, norms and ideologies to the next generation (Kornblum, 2008). Education is only meaningful, however, if the knowledge, values, norms and ideologies taught enable individuals to attain a better future. A

child's educational success is influenced by the learning strategies he or she employs. These learning strategies are closely associated with a child's family background and school. The strengths that a child inherits directly from his or her family, such as economic capital, social capital, academic capital and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1994), increase his or her chances at academic success and educational excellence.

Family background is important in moulding parents' aspirations for and expectations of their child's academic achievement. Parents' aspirations for and expectations of their child's academic achievement, in turn, determine parents' level of involvement in their child's education (Catsambis, 1998; Entwisle & Alexander, 1990; Kaplan, Liu, & Kaplan, 2001; Marjoribanks, 1987). Parental involvement promotes educational achievement, but not all children have involved parents. Children without parental support, especially those who are neglected and/or living in a children's home or orphanage, may not have the chance to learn educational aspirations, expectations or requirements from their families the way other children do. Hence, lack of parental involvement impacts children's attitudes and behaviours toward the learning process.

BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCH

Parents are important in instilling high educational aspirations and expectations in their children. One general and consistent finding is that parents' aspirations and expectations for their child prompt them to become involved in practices that have positive effects on their child's education (Catsambis, 1998; Fan & Chen, 2001; Halle, Kurtz-Costes & Mahoney, 1997; Shumow & Miller, 2001). According to Catsambis (1998), parents with high expectations and levels of involvement have a positive effect on their child's educational achievement. Similarly, Fan & Chen (2001) and Halle et al. (1997) find that parents' aspirations and expectations are very important to ensuring their child's educational excellence. Shumow and Miller's (2001) study also proves that good performance in school correlates positively with level of parental involvement in their child's education.

Parents' aspirations and expectations are the foundation for parental involvement at home and at school. Various studies have identified parental involvement practices at home (Baker & Stevenson, 1986; Entwisle & Hayduk, 1981; Ho Sui-Chu & Willms, 1996; Israel, Beaulieu & Hartless, 2001; Lockheed, Fuller & Nyirogo, 1989) and at school (Baker & Stevenson, 1986; Epstein, 1995; Lareau, 1987; Milne, Myers, Rosenthal & Ginsburg, 1986; Ramsay, Harold, Hawk, Marriot & Poskitt, 1992; Reay, 2004) that have positive effects on a child's achievement. Furthermore, parents' readiness in creating a suitable learning

environment for the child (Peng & Wright, 1994), supervision of and assistance with a child's homework (Balli, Demo & Wedman, 1998; Callahan, Rademacher & Hildreth, 1998), provision of educational activities at home (Izzo, Weissberg, Kasprow & Fendich, 1999) and attendance at school activities (Ho Sui-Chu & Willms, 1996) increase a child's potential success in education. Moreover, Marcon's (1999) research on parental involvement highlights the importance of parents' high level of commitment to their child's education, since this commitment helps children refine their academic skills.

Studies evaluating the influence of family background on children's academic achievement also reveal a positive relationship between a family's socioeconomic status and their child's educational success. Children from families of higher socioeconomic backgrounds receive more support and parental involvement, enabling them to devote more time and energy to their school work. Studies carried out by Ho Sui-Chu & Willms (1996), Katsilis & Rubinson (1990) and Lueptow (1975) show that a family's socioeconomic status has a positive effect on level of parental involvement and, accordingly, a child's success. Furthermore, Israel et al. (2001) also demonstrate that family background attributes, especially social capital, can have a powerful and positive impact on a child's education. Here, parents with greater social capital (measured in terms of highest level of education completed, occupation and income level) have more opportunities for effective involvement their child's education and are better able to facilitate their child's success in school.

As previously discussed, parental involvement is vital in shaping parents' aspirations for and expectations of their child's educational achievement. Involved parents partake in various educational practices in the hopes of enhancing their child's academic performance. Parents from high socioeconomic backgrounds tend to have more social, cultural and economic resources than parents from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Thus, children from higher socioeconomic backgrounds benefit from the additional resources their parents can provide to fulfil their educational needs.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The studies discussed above suggest that a child's academic ability and intellectual strength depend on the level of support he or she receives at home from an early age. A weak family environment can easily have a negative impact on a student's educational achievement. As Sewell and Hauser (1980) assert, the impact of socioeconomic status on family environment is greater than a child's natural capabilities. Thus, a child's educational success depends more on his or

her family's wealth and aspirations than his or her own ability and effort (Brown, 1990).

Not all children benefit from their family environments. For children raised in children's homes or foster care, family background does not play an important role in shaping academic interests and effort. Instead, these children's learning strategies are fully dependent on the attitudes and behaviours toward education they form themselves. In such cases, it is nearly impossible for children to succeed academically without great effort. These children must work hard to establish attitudes and behaviours toward learning that enable them to excel educationally. Thus, attitudes and behaviours toward education are the most crucial factors to emphasise in evaluating the academic success or failure of children raised in children's homes, foster homes or foster care.

In recent years, a considerable amount of literature has been published on foster care and foster home children. Numerous studies address issues of disrupted education, low academic achievement and poor school performance among foster care and foster home children (Barth, 1990; Blome, 1997; Shin, 2003; Farruggia, Greenberger, Chen, & Heckhausen, 2006; Runyan & Gould, 1985). In their study on foster care and foster home children, Runyan & Gould (1985) find that children raised in such environments have lower IQs and perform poorly academically compared to their non-foster counterparts. Children raised in foster care had lower school attendance rates, were more likely to be held back due to poor academic performance and to fail in school. A small study by Barth (1990) on 55 young adults who had left foster care found that more than half of the participants did not have high school degrees when they left foster care, mainly because they lacked a good understanding of the importance of education and schooling.

Blome (1997) investigated the differences between the educational experiences of foster care and non-foster care youth. The study found that foster children receive lower grades in high school compared to non-foster children. The study also revealed that foster children typically spend less time on their studies than their non-foster peers. Shin (2003) addresses the interplay between foster children's educational aspirations, problem solving skills and reading achievement. The study's findings reveal that children in foster care who have higher educational aspirations and good problem-solving skills excel in their reading. A recent study by Farruggia et al. (2006) involving 163 foster care children with a matched sample of 163 comparison children finds that foster care youth have lower levels of academic achievement and lower academic aspirations and expectations than their non-foster counterparts.

Research needs to inquire into the real problems faced by children in foster care and foster homes that hinder them from aspiring to excel educationally. The main weakness of previous studies is their failure to address the extent to which children's attitudes and behaviours toward learning impact their passion for education. These studies also fail to examine hidden perceptions foster children have about themselves which hamper them from adopting attitudes and behaviours conducive to educational success.

To address these gaps in the literature, the current study explores at-home learning patterns among children who are neglected and raised in children's homes. The first objective of this research is to identify attitudes and behaviours toward at-home learning among children living in children's homes. The second objective of this research is to identify and explain the factors that influence these children's attitudes and behaviours toward at-home learning.

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted at Children's Home Taiping, located in the state of Perak Darul Ridzuan. This private home accommodates 80 children of Indian descent. The research presented here utilised structured interviews. Data analysis is based on sample of interviews with 39 children taken from the total 80 children living at Children's Home Taiping. The interviews relate the children's personal backgrounds and attitudes and behaviours toward at-home learning. All 39 children are in secondary school. The study focuses on children in secondary schools and thus does not include the foster home's of the other 41 children, who are in the primary school or have already completed their schooling. See Table 1 for the background of the respondents studied at Children's Home Taiping.

Table 1. Background of respondent's at Children's Home Taiping

	Respondent Background	Percentage (%)
Sex	Male	43.6
	Female	56.4
Age	13 to 15 years old	61.5
	16 to 18 years old	38.5
Education level	Form 1– Form 3	76.9
	Form 4 – Form 5	23.1
Number of years residing in children's home	5 years and below	66.7
	6 years and above	33.3

n = 39 respondents
Source. Children's Home Taiping

As indicated in Table 1, approximately 43.6% respondents are male, while 56.4% respondents are female. Approximately 61.5% respondents were 13 to 15 years of age, while 38.5% respondents were 16 to 18 years of age. The majority of respondents were from the lower secondary level (studying in Forms 1, 2 or 3), while the rest were from the upper secondary level (studying in Forms 4 or 5.) Furthermore, 66.7% of respondents have been at Children's Home Taiping for 5 or fewer years. Approximately 33.3% of respondents have been at Children's Home Taiping for more than 5 years.

Table 2. Details on variables used in the analysis

Variables	Details
Complete all school homework	Effort taken by the children to complete all the school homework given by teachers at school.
Time management for education and other home task	Effort taken by the children to manage time between education purpose and home task.
Good time management for learning and entertainment	Effort taken by the children to manage time between learning and watching television.
Prepare short notes	Effort taken by the children to prepare their own short notes for reading subjects.
Individual focused learning	Effort taken by the children to learn on their own and not in groups.
Not copying friends homework	Effort taken by the children to complete their homework on their own without copying their friends.
Practice past years questions	Effort taken by the children to practice past years examination papers.
Preparation before going to school	Effort taken by the children to do some revision on the topics that will be taught by their teachers the following day.
Learning by following lessons time table	Effort taken by the children to learn by following their lesson time table which has been prepared at home.
Utilising school holidays wisely for studying	Effort taken by the children to utilise their school holidays for studying.

Structured interviews with these children were conducted using a questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into two sections. The first section gathered the children's personal information, such as gender, age, years of education and length of residence in the children's home. The second section included questions in a 'Yes' and 'No' answer format to gather information on children's attitudes and behaviours toward their at-home learning strategies. For each question answered 'No', children were asked to provide an 'open-ended' explanation of their answer.

Table 2 provides the variables related to the strategies implemented by the children at Children's Home Taiping.

Each structured questionnaire interview took approximately 30 minutes to complete. The researcher himself conducted the structured interviews. Each respondent who took part in a structured interview was informed that any information disclosed during the interview session would remain confidential.

FINDINGS

One of the primary goals of this study was to identify the effectiveness of attitudes and behaviours toward at-home learning among children residing at Children's Home Taiping. The data obtained show that these children possess positive attitudes and behaviours toward several educational aspects. In most educational aspects, however, these children show less positive attitudes and behaviours toward their at-home learning.

Table 3 shows these children's attitudes and behaviours toward at-home learning. Based on this table, approximately 74.4% respondents complete all the homework their teachers assign. Approximately 61.5% respondents effectively divide their time between education and other home tasks and consider themselves good at managing their time spent learning and time spent on entertainment.

Approximately 48.7% of respondents prepare short notes, 46.2% practice individual focused learning without any interruption from other friends at the home, and 43.6% do not copy their friends' homework due the next school day. Only 12.8% of respondents learn by making and following a lessons timetable and use school holidays wisely for studying. Furthermore, 23.1% of respondents practice questions from past years and prepare work on relevant subjects before going to school. Nearly 74.4% of respondents report that they complete all homework assigned at school, but the completion of homework also includes the tendency to copy their friends' work.

Based on the analysis, 87.2% of respondents neither learn by preparing and following lessons timetables nor use school holidays to catch up on studying. Approximately 76.9% of respondents neither practice questions from past years nor properly prepare work on relevant subjects before going to school. Furthermore, more than 50.0% of respondents do not focus on individual learning, do not prepare short notes and frequently copy their friends' homework to submit.

Table 3. Respondent's attitude and behaviour towards at-home learning at Children's Home Taiping

Attitude and Behaviour	Yes		No	
	f	%	f	%
Complete all school homework	29	74.4	10	25.6
Time management for education and other home task	24	61.5	15	38.5
Good time management for learning and entertainment	24	61.5	15	38.5
Prepare short notes	19	48.7	20	51.3
Individual focused learning	18	46.2	21	53.8
Not copying friends homework	17	43.6	22	56.4
Practice past years questions	9	23.1	30	76.9
Preparation before going to school	9	23.1	30	76.9
Learning by following lessons time table	5	12.8	34	87.2
Utilising school holidays wisely for studying	5	12.8	34	87.2

n = 39 respondent
Source. Children's Home Taiping

To explain these data, the following section examines the factors that influence the formation of attitudes and behaviours toward learning among respondents at Children's Home Taiping. This section prioritises 7 items selected from Table 3 that hinder these children's formation of positive attitudes and behaviours toward at-home learning. See Table 4 for the items selected.

Based on the data indicated in Table 4, several factors deter the formation of positive attitudes and behaviours toward at-home learning among respondents at Children's Home Taiping. During the structured interviews, 32.4% of respondents said they do not learn according to a lessons timetable because they are too lazy to do so. These respondents emphasised that they preferred to leave their time flexible rather follow a fixed timetable. As one respondent stated:

> I'm too lazy to have a timetable for learning. I prefer to study whenever I have a free time. I need a flexible time to study. Of course many students have their own timetable but practically, are they following that?

Approximately 26.5% of respondents stated that they do not have the skills needed to prepare lessons timetables. This knowledge gap stunts the children's efforts to prepare suitable timetables for their subjects. Approximately 14.7% of respondents said they do not have enough time to follow the timetables they create. One respondent recounted difficulties in learning based on the timetable he created:

> My time is fully occupied for school homework, playing, watching television and other home tasks. Therefore, I do not have enough time to follow the timetable. Moreover, I don't really like to study. I only study once in a while. Definitely, I can't fulfil the need of learning according to the time set.

Approximately 17.7% of respondents stated that they do not have time to prepare timetables for their lessons. According to these children, completing the homework assigned at school and their daily tasks at the home is very time consuming. In fact, they have just enough free time for recreational activities with their friends at the home. Only a small portion of respondents, approximately 2.9%, said they have difficulties following their timetables. Another 2.9% of respondents stressed that they do not need timetables for learning purposes; these children did not perceive timetable usage as helpful to their learning. A respondent in Form Two argued:

> I think that I do not require a time table to study. I never forget my homework. I always do my revision from time to time. I am confident with my way of studying. A fixed timetable makes learning more complicated.

When the respondents were interviewed on factors that hinder them from using school holidays wisely for studying, 61.8% said they need school holidays for recreational and entertainment purposes. As one respondent expressed:

> I do not study during my school holidays. I don't want to think about school or my books during the holidays. I need this days for my entertainment and recreational. School holidays are meant for relaxing our mind. This is the time for me to do other things besides studying.

These children could not balance time needed for studying with time spent on recreation and entertainment. Approximately 20.6% of respondents said they visit their parents during the school holidays. The remaining children said they were too lazy to learn (8.8%) or too disinterested in their studies (8.8%).

Approximately 40.0% of respondents said they had no reading materials that would enable them to practice questions from past examination. Approximately 23.4% of respondents said that even though they have past year questions, they always face difficulties answering them. One of the respondents commented:

> I do not practice on past year questions. The questions are very tough. I rather practice school exercises. It is far easier to answer. In fact, I'm not a good achiever at school.

Laziness (20.0%) and lack of interest (13.3%) also prevented children from practicing questions from past examinations. Only 3.3% of respondents said they have insufficient time to practice using those materials.

Regarding factors that deter respondents from preparing relevant subjects before going to school, approximately 40.0% of respondents said they do not have enough time to prepare in advance for the lesson topics teachers would cover at school the next day. A Form Three student respondent noted:

> I could not prepare myself with certain topics or lessons that will be taught by my teacher at school the next day. The homework given by school is very taxing and time consuming. It takes me a long time to complete it. I don't have time to prepare for my next day lessons.

Approximately 20.0% of respondents said they were too lazy to prepare ahead of time while another 20.0% of respondents stated that they had no time for early preparation. Approximately 10.0% of respondents said they need lessons to be taught by teachers earlier in order to understand the topics more fully. They are confident that teachers' lessons in class enable them to understand the topics. Approximately 3.3% of respondents said they are too disinterested to prepare early while another 6.7% of respondents admitted that they routinely forget to prepare before school.

Approximately 77.3% of respondents who copy their friends' homework said they do so because they do not know how to answer the questions their teachers assign. They see copying as the easiest way to complete their homework. One of the respondents stated:

> To be frank I always copy my friend's homework. I think it is the easiest way to complete my homework, which is given by my teachers. Therefore, I spend less time for doing my homework since I can complete it fast.

Approximately 13.6% of respondents admitted to copying homework from their friends because they themselves did not pay attention during the lessons at school. The remaining 9.1% of respondents said they do not have enough time to complete their homework.

Table 4. Factors that deter respondent's attitude and behaviour towards at-home learning at Taiping Children's Home

Attitude and Behaviour	Deterrent Factor	Percentage (%)
Not learning by following lessons time table 34 respondents (87.2%)	Lazy	32.4
	Do not know how to prepare timetable	26.5
	Not enough time to prepare timetable	17.7
	Not enough time to follow timetable	14.7
	Could not follow timetable	2.9
	Does not require timetable	2.9
	Do not understand the important of timetable	2.9
Not utilising school holidays wisely for studying 34 respondents (87.2%)	School holidays is meant for recreation and entertainment	61.8
	Visit parents	20.6
	Lazy to learn	8.8
	No interest in learning	8.8
Not practicing past years questions 30 respondents (76.9%)	No learning material	40.0
	Do not know method of answering	23.4
	Lazy	20.0
	No interest	13.3
	Not enough time	3.3
No preparation before going to school 30 respondents (76.9%)	Not enough time	40.0
	Lazy	20.0
	Do not know	20.0
	Need preliminary teachings	10.0
	Forgetful	6.7
	No interest	3.3
Do copy friend's homework 22 respondents (56.4%)	Do not know method of answering	77.3
	Do not focus on teachers' teachings at school	13.6
	Not enough time	9.1
Not emphasizing individual focused learning 21 respondents (53.8%)	Not interested	66.7
	Lazy	19.0
	Need someone's help	14.3
No preparation of short notes 20 respondents (51.3%)	Do not know method of preparation	50.0
	Lazy	25.0
	Does not require short notes	20.0
	Not enough time	5.0

n = 39 respondents
Source. Children's Home Taiping

When questioned about the factors that deter them from emphasising individual-focused learning, the majority of respondents (66.7%) stated that they were not interested in studying on their own at the home. Approximately 19.0% of respondents said they felt too lazy to study individually and indicated that they prefer learning in groups. Socialisation and peer influence among the children in Children's Home Taiping seem to account for this preference. As one respondent stated:

> I prefer to study with my friends. Individual focused learning is boring and not interesting. It makes me sleepy. I learn better in a group with my friends. It is really a fun to have them around. I think it is difficult for me to excel by self-study.

Only 14.3% of respondents said they could not understand the content of their reading material and thus needed their friends to help clarify it.

Approximately 50.0% of respondents said they do not know how to prepare short notes. As a Form Four respondent explained:

> I do not prepare short notes. Anyway, I have no knowledge of preparing short notes. Moreover, I wonder if my friends have their own short notes. I feel shy to seek help from others to work on this.

Approximately 25.0% of respondents were too lazy to prepare short notes—tools that are crucial to enhancing students' learning patterns. Another 20.0% of respondents stated that they do not require short notes. The other 5.0% of respondents said they do not have time to prepare the notes.

Even in this small sample, analysis of the data has allowed the researcher to identify educational attitudes and behaviours detrimental to respondents' efforts at effective at-home learning at Children's Home Taiping. The researcher has also explained the underlying factors that prevent the formation of positive attitudes and behaviours toward at-home learning among the respondents studied.

DISCUSSION

The prevailing opinion among educational researchers holds that positive attitudes and behaviours toward learning are critical to academic success. For almost all children, these attitudes and behaviours are greatly impacted by parental involvement. Prior studies have noted the important role parents' aspirations and expectations play in enhancing levels of parental involvement at

home (Balli et al., 1998; Baker & Stevenson, 1986; Callahan et al., 1998; Entwisle & Hayduk, 1981; Ho Sui-Chu & Willms, 1996; Israel et al., 2001; Izzo et al., 1999; Lockheed et al., 1989; Peng & Wright, 1994) and at school (Baker & Stevenson, 1986; Epstein, 1995; Ho Sui-Chu & Willms, 1996; Lareau, 1987; Milne et al., 1986; Ramsay et al., 1992; Reay, 2004). However, not all children are fortunate enough to have parents who cultivate positive attitudes and behaviours toward the learning process. Almost all children living in children's homes or orphanages, for instance, have lost or been abandoned by their parents and thus lack the parental involvement other children enjoy.

Descriptive analysis from this study clearly demonstrates that most children residing at Children's Home Taiping show negative attitudes and behaviours toward various aspects of learning. The findings indicate that most of these children do not use lessons timetables and do not utilise school holidays wisely for learning purposes. They do not practice on examinations from past years, or prepare ahead for the subjects they will study in school the next day. Moreover, they often copy their friends' homework before submitting it to their teachers at school. These children also fail to study independently and do not undertake activities that can facilitate their learning, such as preparing short notes for their subjects.

The results of the study point to laziness as a main factor preventing children from utilising lessons timetables, practicing past year examination questions and preparing themselves before going to school. Lazy attitudes also hamper these children from emphasising focused individual learning and utilising school holidays wisely for studying.

Lack of interest in learning also correlates with less interest in utilising school holidays wisely for studying, practicing past year questions, preparing relevant subjects before going to school and emphasising focused individual learning. Lack of motivation and exposure to the importance of education deters these children from developing successful learning attitudes.

Insufficient time is also a factor that deters children from utilising lessons timetables and preparing relevant subjects before going to school. This factor also prompts children to copy their friends' homework before submitting it to their teachers at school. Lack of time also accounts for some students' failure to prepare short notes for learning. In such cases, the children are incapable of planning and managing time for their own educational purposes. These children also have no clear understanding of how to make short notes and lessons timetables or to prepare their subjects before going to school.

The current study also finds that these children encounter problems with effective learning techniques. The practice of copying their friends' homework to complete work given by teachers at school is common. The tendency to copy their friends' homework and the failure to practice past year examination questions negatively impacts the children's educational achievement.

As Altshuler (1997) notes, most foster children experience a wide array of academic and cognitive difficulties. The current study strongly supports Altshuler's findings. It can be argued that the academic difficulties these children face are a result of the negative attitudes and behaviours they have developed toward the learning process. Laziness, lack of interest, waning motivation and poor time management were detrimental habits and dispositions formed by the children themselves. They strengthened the children's negative learning attitudes and behaviours. Unsurprisingly, Runyan & Gould (1985) report that children in foster care and foster homes had lower IQs and levels of academic performance than their non-foster counterparts.

The current study supports Barth's (1990) contention that educational failure occurs when children do not understand the importance of education. As this study's descriptive analysis makes clear, the children observed at Children's Home Taiping did not understand the importance of education to ensuring a promising future. The longer the children remain in the foster home, the less likely they are to perform well in school.

The current study's findings also support research conducted by Farruggia et al. (2006) and Shin (2003) on the area of the brain that links self-aspirations to education attainment. In the current study, lack of self-aspirations was found to propagate negative attitudes and behaviours toward learning among the children. Lack of self-aspirations gave way to feelings of laziness, disinterest in education and taking for granted of all the opportunities available for effective learning. Self-aspirations lay a strong foundation for a child's own ability to learn effectively. Most children at Children's Home Taiping did not demonstrate positive self-aspirations.

There are two possible explanations for this finding: (1) the absence of parental support and/or (2) the social environment of the children's home. Parents are widely recognised as children's first teachers who continuously impact their children's educational success. Various studies have suggested that parental involvement is an important factor in ensuring children's educational success. As shown by Catsambis (1998), Fan and Chen (2001), Halle et al. (1997) and Shumow & Miller (2001), parents' high expectations and levels of involvement help children achieve educational excellence. Parents' educational expectations also motivate parents to monitor their child's education, create the best possible

learning environment, oversee homework given by the school, provide reading material, identify educational problems their child faces and monitor their child's progress. High parental aspirations and expectations increase children's determination to excel academically.

The absence of parental support limits the supervision and personal attention children living in foster homes receive. These children must rely mainly on the management staff to fulfil their educational needs. Although the staff members are responsible and do what they can to children's educational needs, their support is still not the same as that provided by a child's own parents. The absence of parental support negatively affects children's creation of positive attitudes and behaviours toward at-home learning. The role of parents in educating and fulfilling a child's educational needs cannot be played by anyone else, including the management staff at the children's home.

In terms of the social environment of the children's home, children live together with friends of differing ages and sexes. In such an environment, the peer group exerts a strong influence and encourages more socialisation. Time spent on social interaction uses up time that may otherwise have been spent on academics. The social environment plays little role in cultivating children's self-management, learning attitudes and long-term objectives. Hence, absence of the parental support and the social environment of children's home strongly affect the development of self-aspirations toward learning at this home. Both factors hinder the formation of positive attitudes and behaviours among these children.

In sum, it is clear that the absence of parental support and the social environment of the Children's Home Taiping powerfully impact these children's self-aspirations and attitudes and behaviours toward learning. This finding suggests the need to generate more programs for children placed in children's homes, orphanages or foster care aimed at enhancing their opportunities for educational excellence and future success. The management staff at Children's Home Taiping should take into account the problems these children face and construct more comprehensive plans to encourage high self-aspirations and good self-management among the children. Such efforts can shape the children's learning patterns and enable them to explore the world of knowledge with greater vision and mission.

CONCLUSION

The present study was designed to determine the attitudes and behaviours toward at-home learning among children residing at Children's Home Taiping and the factors that influence the formation of those attitudes and behaviours. This study

has found that most of the children living at Children's Home Taiping display negative attitudes and behaviours toward various aspects of at-home learning. This analysis of these children's negative attitudes and behaviours toward at-home learning leads to the following conclusions. First, self-aspirations in learning are key elements to forming positive at-home learning attitudes and behaviours. Among the children at Children's Home Taiping, low self-aspirations hinder the development of positive learning attitudes and behaviours. Second, the low self-aspirations among these children are largely a function of the absence of parental support and the social environment of the children's home. Thus, the absence of parental support and the social environment of the children's home give an impact on the children in possessing high self aspiration and good self management in learning. A positive social environment can enhance children's learning attitudes and behaviours. The negative social environment at Children's Home Taiping, however, prevents the children from getting the motivation and support they need, thereby limiting their development of positive learning attitudes and behaviours. Positive attitudes and behaviours toward at-home learning, such as learning by following lessons timetables, utilising school holidays wisely for studying, practicing past year examination questions, preparing before going to school, completing homework without copying friends' work, emphasising focused individual learning and preparing short notes, flourish in competitive learning environments that encourage effective self-aspirations and self-management the learning process.

This study contributes to the understanding of factors that deter children living at Children's Home Taiping from developing positive at-home learning attitudes and behaviours. More broadly, this study sheds light on the importance of parental support in ensuring children's academic success and the importance of a competitive learning environment that promotes educational aspirations, motivation and self-management to the academic achievement of children without parental support.

The findings in this report are subject to at least four limitations. First, these data apply only to children of Indian descent. Malaysian and Chinese children were not included in the study. Secondly, the study focuses on one private welfare home. There are many other private welfare homes that were not included in the study. Thirdly, there are also public welfare homes run by the government under the Department of Social Welfare Malaysia that were not considered. Finally, the data apply only to secondary school children. Children in primary school were not part of the study. The findings of this study suggest the need for several additional lines of research. Further investigation and experimentation in the areas outlined above is strongly recommended.

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