

Trust school students' academic performance in Malaysia

Norazila Osman¹, Kamarul Bahari Yaakub²

^{1,2}Faculty of Management and Economics, Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, Perak

Abstract

The quality of students' performance is one of the main focuses in the Malaysia Education Blueprint (MEB) 2013-2025. Thus, the Trust School Programme (TSP) was formulated to accomplish the aspirations and targets of educational transformation. TSP is a national-level education transformation programme that aims to encourage the involvement of private sectors in efforts to boost the quality of education in the country. This goal is in accordance with the Malaysia Education Blueprint (MEB) 2013-2025 objective, which aims to provide all Malaysians with quality and affordable education whilst maximising students' performance. TSP is underpinned by four standards and practices as the framework, namely, Trust Schools' Standard and Practices (TSSP). However, studies on TSSP are less conducted compared to the studies on Malaysia Education Quality Standard. As a result, the effectiveness of the TSSP implementation in terms of academic performance is rather vague. Therefore, this study was conducted to investigate the level of Trust School students' academic performance from the perspective of Trust School teachers who are the implementers of this programme. A total of 209 Trust School teachers in Malaysia were involved as the sample of this study. The survey method was used in this study. A questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale was used to measure the students' academic performance. Data from the questionnaires were analysed using IBM SPSS software. Descriptive analysis was used to observe mean and standard deviation values, as well as the percentage. Based on the analysis conducted, the findings have shown that the mean value of academic performance is 3.7713, and the standard deviation is 0.66357. The result indicates that the level of Trust school students' academic performance is high.

Keywords: TSSP; academic performance; Trust School

** Corresponding author: Norazila Osman, Faculty of Management and Economics, Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, e mail: ilaosman@gmail.com

Introduction

Education is a vital aspect of nation-building that contributes to social and economic development (Lu, 2018). The World Bank (2018) has reported that the world is currently facing a learning crisis that can affect education outcomes. Nevertheless, the studies on improving students' achievement based on education quality standards in schools (Jiali, Yipeng, He & Qiong, 2019; Ajayi & Oyeniya, 2017) are quite limited (Scheiler, 2018; Sfakianaki, 2018).

Generally, the practice of education quality standards covers the system and processes of fulfilling students' needs and achieving the goals and educational organization objectives (Hashim, 2018). The practice of education quality standards improves the teaching and learning quality and the students' academic performance (Akhtar, Zameer & Saeed, 2014; Jiali et al., 2019). Therefore, the main focus of education sector throughout the countries in the world is improving academic performance (Garira, Howie & Plomp, 2020) along with Malaysia.

Academic performance is a result (Yahya, Noraffandy & Lee, 2011) of the learning skills mastered. Educational institutions have outlined specific standards through a set of skills that must be acquired by the students to evaluate their academic performance. The content of the curriculum includes communication skills, Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) and logical reasoning among students (Namita Jain, 2018). According to Cheng et al. (2001), students need to be taught to explore their potential and subsequently develop and expand their potential towards achieving excellent academic achievement.

Many countries including Malaysia have endorsed Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) as a global assessment tool for students' performance in Mathematics, Science and Reading. Basically, students' performance in these assessments would reflect the respective country's ranking among all participating countries in the world and the impression of its education system (Huang, 2019).

However, it was disheartening to learn that the performance of Malaysian students declined as they failed to achieve the average score of international benchmarks in both assessments. Malaysia had done defectively in TIMSS 2009 and 2003 as it slipped to clinch the 71st place out of 74 participating countries.

The Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE) was taking this matter seriously and looking forward for the best way to improve the quality of our education system to boost students' performance locally and globally (MOE, 2016; Noredayu, Mahaliza & Hamidah, 2016). As a result, MOE came up with the idea of implementing education transformation through MEB (2013-2025), which contains 11 significant shifts towards achieving the aspirations and targets of educational transformation. In this regard, the quality of students' achievement is now one of the main focuses in the MEB (2013-2025).

In accordance with the aspiration to achieve the goals of academic performance, MOE has established Trust School Programme (TSP) to achieve the aspirations and targets of educational transformation. TSP was established to fulfill the aspirations and targets of educational transformation as desired. The aim is to optimize students' achievement so that the national education sector may develop highly skilled professionals or human resources with leadership qualities to empower the country's economic sector, as well as a catalyst for transformation in human development (MOE, 2016).

TSP is an educational transformation programme at the national level, implemented through public-private partnerships. The primary purpose of this programme is to encourage the involvement of the private sector in efforts to upgrade the national education quality through the improvement of school management systems, educational delivery methods and teaching and learning environment in government schools. The primary outcome of this programme is the improvement of students' achievement in various fields, including moral and attitude, beliefs, national identity, academics, and co-curriculum in line with the aspirations of students in MEB 2013-2025. The implementation of TSP was part of the focus in the 9th Shift of MEB (2013-2025), which should be driven to achieve the desired goals (MOE, 2016).

The TSP is underpinned by four standards and practices known as the Trust Schools' Standards and Practice (TSSP). TSSP is actually an achievement standard for five years, observed by the management of Trust School to achieve the Accreditation Level. TSSP provides a holistic framework for school transformation, sustainable and continuous improvement. This Standard Document clarifies the meaning of the Trust School and identifies the systems, practices, and pedagogy applied in the programme, and encourages continuous development.

TSSP implies the adaptation of the 21st Century Learning concept to improve the quality of learning in Malaysia. TSSP is basically focusing on a holistic school transformation through developing high-quality leadership and management, improving the quality of learning and teaching, maximising students potential and achievement, and strengthening rapport with parents, communities, and stakeholders.

The main goal of TSSP is to improve students' achievement as well as students' academic performance. (MOE, 2016). On the other side, the UPSR result for the year 2017, 2018 and 2019 released by MOE revealed that the passing percentage obtained by the students of some trust schools declined during these years. This scenario contradicts to the vision and objective of TSSP which is to maximize students' potential and achievement (MOE, 2016). Previous research on TSSP components such as school leadership, curriculum management, students' performance, parent and community involvement has shown a significant relationship between these dimensions and students' academic achievement (Abang Ismail, Sharifah, Haminah & Katijah, 2018). In fact, the Schools Inspectorate and Quality Assurance (JNJK, 2016) recommended that these standards to be prepared as efficiently as possible as it has a positive impact on school excellence and students' development in academic, co-curricular, and personality elements in particular. However, the things happening in these trust schools is incompatible with the mission and vision of TSSP. It can be said that the performance of the trust school students is rather disappointing and is not aligned with the target of TSSP itself. Additionally, studies on TSSP are less conducted compared to the studies on Malaysia Education Quality Standard. The effectiveness of TSSP on the element of students' academic achievement is still unclear because there isn't any empirical studies conducted to assess the level of students' academic performance in Trust School. Studies are focusing more on the effectiveness of SKPMg2 on students' academic performance (Khuzaimah, Mohd Yusoff & Shahlan, 2019) instead of TSSP. As a result, the effectiveness of the TSSP implementation in terms of academic performance is rather vague.

Therefore, this research is necessary to identify the level of academic performance of Trust school students so that the respective parties could find ways to empower trust schools in the aspect of academic well-being. Additionally, it is hoped that the findings of this study would inspire programme coordinators and implementers to keep working together to strengthen effort to attain the true goals of the implementation of this Trust schools.

Research Objective

This study aims to investigate the level of students' academic performance in Trust Schools in Malaysia. The objective of this research is

1. To measure the level of students' academic performance in Malaysian Trust Schools

Literature Review

Several studies on structure reformation and education function had been conducted using the methods and approaches of Education quality standards and Practices (Cruz et al., 2016; Pourrajab et al., 2007; Sunder, 2016). However, there was some skepticism about implementing these Standards and Practices as a whole (Law, 2010; Quinn, 2009; Venkatraman, 2007). Sonia-Garcia and Martinez-Lorente (2014) also acknowledged this statement, whereby only a few studies presented empirical data on education quality standards and practices.

Academicians and administrators gave different feedback towards implementing the education quality standards and practices. Some researchers agree that education quality standards and practices help to improve the performance such as enhancing educational processes, motivating the educational environment as well as enhancing academic curriculum in advanced countries, such as Singapore, Romania, and United States America (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2010; Sarafidou & Chatziioanniidis, 2011; Nor Syazwani, 2015).

In Malaysia, the awareness of the importance of standards and quality in education has begun quite long. It started after the formation of the Razak Statement in 1956, followed by the Education Ordinance in 1957. At that time, the step taken by the government was to establish the *Jemaah Nazir Sekolah* (JNS) or known as the Federal Inspectorate of Schools (Hamid, 2013; KPM, 2020) education quality control body. Later, they changed the name of JNS to the Schools Inspectorate and Quality Assurance (JNJK), entrusted to oversee and monitor the quality of education in the country.

The main task of JNJK is to ensure that the level of education in the country is at a high level, as stipulated in the Education Act 1996. The Schools Inspectorate can be described as the ‘guardian’ of quality and education standards to accomplish academic excellence. Every year, the agenda of JNJK is to examine, monitor, select, investigate complaints and conduct a professional approach (JNJK, 2009). JNJK has introduced a comprehensive education quality standard known as Malaysia Education Quality Standard (SKPM) in 2010 to underpin the direction of education in Malaysia.

The SKPM framework shows the MOE’s determination to uphold the aspiration of excellence and quality education in Malaysia, in line with the Malaysia Education Blueprint (MEB). SKPM has been reviewed from time to time to strengthen the quality of education in general and schools in particular. The chronology of changes and improvements in the Malaysian Education Quality Standards drives the ways for educators to follow in developing academic excellence.

Meanwhile, SKPMg2 was established from the evaluation and observation from the top management of MOE, School Inspectorates, principals, excellent teachers, expert teachers, teachers’ unions, experts in the field of education from public universities, literature references, books, various educational standards documents from our country and abroad (Sathiyabama, 2017). The basic concept of SKPMg2 refers to the Effective School Model (Mortimore, 1995) presented in the Roadmap of the Schools Inspectorate and Quality Assurance (JNJK) 2010-2025.

The effort to uphold the quality of education in the country is continued through the massive transformation of education by the Ministry of Education Malaysia in the Malaysian Education Blueprint (MEB) 2013-2025. MEB was developed to evaluate the performance of the national education system by taking into account the previous achievements in education and comparing it with international benchmarks (MEB, 2013-2025). It is due to the decline of the Malaysian student’s achievement in the global assessments of PISA and TIMSS. Therefore, MOE has implemented a review of the national education system to be redeveloped in the new Education Development Plan with a vision to improve students’ performance in line with international education standards (MOE, 2016).

The Trust School Programme (TSP) began when the National Economic Council entrusted MOE in June 2009 and the Education Delivery Task Force (DTF) to develop the TSP framework. This objective was in accordance with the aspirations in Malaysia Education Blueprint (MEB) 2013-2025, which aims to enhance access to quality, affordable education for all Malaysians and maximizing student performance p using established systems and resources. This programme is one of the Government Transformation Programme (GTP), introduced and pioneered by the Prime Minister (MOE, 2016).

Furthermore, TSP is an initiative that aims to support the vision and aspirations of the MOE directly. TSP is developed and designed by considering all the views and feedback from various stakeholders in education. The programmes provided in TSP are in line with MEB 2013-2025, which is to improve the quality of education in Malaysia through the five aspirations system: access, quality, equity, unity, and efficiency. The Ministry of Education Malaysia has outlined 11 significant shifts to transform the national education system in MEB 2013-2025. Reviewing the outcome aspects in MEB, the TSP has fulfilled the initiatives planned in shifts 4,5 and 6. The TSP Strategy in Trust Schools' Standards and Practice is similar to the Transformation of School Learning or the 21st Century Learning. The critical achievement which led to the formation of shifts 1, 2, 3, and 10 related to the Trust School strategic goals. Thus, it is seen that this programme support and fulfils the goals and aspirations of national education stated in MEB (KPM, 2016). Although TSP is mentioned in MEB 2013-2025 as one of Shift 9 that mobilizes cooperation between parents, community, and private sector, its execution also involves the goal of producing a skilled student.

In other countries, Trust Schools were established in the early 1960s. Several countries have already implemented the Trust School Programme, such as United Kingdom, India, Zimbabwe, and Zambia. Their concern is similar which is to improve students' achievement and excellence. Trust Schools are also called academy schools in other countries. These Trust Schools are funded by non-governmental organizations such as charities, business institutions, local communities, and non-profit educational organizations. These Trust Schools will be run by those organizations after a contractual alliance with the government has been made. Information related to these schools can be obtained from the official website of the respective organization, which can be accessed at the Indian Education Trust: <https://www.tatatrusters.org/our-work/education>, The School Trust: <https://schoolstrust.co.uk/>, ATSCHISZ: <https://www.atschisz.co.zw/>.

Based on the researcher's reading from the website above, it has been observed that the school's performance in England achieved the above-average record of achievement, where 50% to 60% of students achieved the satisfactory standard in reading, writing, and mathematics. Meanwhile, the students' achievement has shown improvement in English subjects, Mathematics and Science.

Methodology

This study used a quantitative approach in the form of a survey questionnaire. The survey is a research method to obtain information through opinions, attitudes, and perceptions of a population (Creswell, 2013). Furthermore, this research design was selected because it is suitable for the purpose of this study, which is to measure the perception of Trust School teachers on the level of students' academic performance (Creswell, 2012). The design of quantitative study is more structured, formal, specific, and detail. Survey research is also a method of obtaining information in a form of opinions, attitudes, and perceptions of a population (Creswell, 2013). In addition, the quantitative descriptive method provides an overview of phenomena, explains relationships, testing hypotheses, and making predictions from the implications of a problem to be solved (Sukarmin, 2010). Apart from that, the development of questionnaire is simpler and concise, reliable, and valid. Information concerning attitudes, practices, thoughts, and perceptions of respondents from various backgrounds are easier to analyse using questionnaire.

The sample of this study is 170 Trust School teachers as recommended by Balnaves and Caputi (2001) who stated that the sample for survey research should range between a minimum of 30 to a maximum of 500 samples. Therefore, 209 respondents were involved in this study because the researchers are taking precautions against the possibility of receiving less feedback from respondents due to the tight schedule of the teachers during the outbreak of Covid-19.

This research uses a quota sampling technique. This method was chosen to restrain the issue of Trust School teachers transferring to other schools as it is a common scenario in any schools. Teachers who transferred to another school will be replaced by novice teachers, who are certainly less knowledgeable about the implementation of the Trust School. If they are involved in this study, then the data obtained will be inaccurate since they do not have appropriate knowledge and experience regarding the system in Trust School. According to Creswell (2013), respondents of a research must be knowledgeable in the field or phenomenon of the study. Therefore, the quota technique is used. For the quota technique, only teachers with at least two years of teaching experience in Trust Schools will be involved in this study to maintain the reliability of the data obtained. Information regarding their teaching experiences in the Trust School was stated by the

respondents in the demographics section of the questionnaire answered. Then, the researcher will separate all the questionnaires that have been answered according to years of teaching experience in the Trust School. Only questionnaires marked teaching experience in Trust Schools for two years and above will be selected for this study. This process continued until the researcher obtained the needed number of respondents. A minimum of two years of teaching experience is fair enough to be the research respondent because, within two years in Trust School, the respective teachers would be able to understand the school system. Series of catch-up sessions are made for the new teachers to strengthen their skills and knowledge about Trust School in these primary years. Therefore, two years period is sufficient enough for the grooming process of new teachers on the intricacies of implementation and system of the Trust School.

To measure the level of academic performance, there are five items used, one item related to the performance of remedial students and another four items are concerning the Level of Performance (TP) of students in *Pentaksiran Berasaskan Bilik Darjah* (PBD). PBD is a continuous assessment in teaching and learning to obtain information about students' development, progress, abilities, and achievements. PBD is assessed formatively and summatively during the learning process and after the learning process (MOE, 2021). PBD is part of the curriculum, which consists of the content of the lesson, pedagogy, and assessment. These assessments are stated in the Standard Curriculum and Assessment Document (DSKP) of each subject. The following describes the interpretation of TP in general.

Table 1

The Interpretation of PBD Proficiency Level

Level of Performance (TP)	Description	Interpretation
1	Know/remember the basics	Very Poor
2	Understand the basics	Poor
3	Apply/practice	Average
4	Analysis	Good
5	Evaluate	Very Good
6	Generate	Excellent

Note. Adapted from *Buku Panduan Pelaksanaan Pentaksiran Bilik Darjah (PBD) Edisi ke-2, 2021*

The scale used in this questionnaire is a five-point measurement scale. The selection of this five-point range scale is based on previous studies stating that for large-scale research ($N > 100$), the use of five-point was relevant (Finstad, 2009; Leung, 2011). Most researchers suggested using a five-point scale to avoid anxiety and frustration among respondents. In addition, it also increases the response rate among respondents as the use of a five-point scale is much easier and convenient (Babakus & Marigold, 1992; Dawes, 2008; Sachdev, S. B., & Verma, H. V., 2004). The scale used is a five-point Likert scale from number 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

Data were analysed using inferential statistics using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 23.0. Academic achievement was analysed descriptively through the frequency and percentage. After that, the findings of the study are reported through mean values and standard deviations.

Findings

The table below shows the findings of the descriptive analysis of this research in detail with the mean values, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages.

Table 2

The level of academic achievement of students in Trust Schools

	Items	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	Standard Deviations
CA1	The number of Level 1 students who obtained TP 1 and TP 2 in PBD is declining.	-	14 (6.7%)	64 (30.6%)	92 (44%)	39 (18.7%)	3.7464	.83654
CA2	The number of Level 1 students who obtained TP 3 in PBD is increasing.	1 (0.5%)	6 (2.9%)	47 (22.5%)	118 (56.5%)	37 (17.7%)	3.8804	.74035
CA3	The number of Level 2 students who obtained TP 3 in PBD is declining.	2 (1.0%)	9 (4.3%)	68 (32.5%)	101 (48.3%)	29 (13.9%)	3.6986	.79666
CA4	The number of Level 2 students who obtained TP 4,5,6 in PBD is increasing.	1 (0.5%)	5 (2.4%)	47 (22.5%)	117 (56 %)	39 (18.7%)	3.8995	.73671
CA5	The number of remedial students is declining.	2 (1.0%)	17 (8.1%)	67 (32.1%)	93 (44.5%)	30 (14.4%)	3.6316	.86222
Overall							3.7713	.66357

Descriptive statistics are used to describe the basic features of the data in a study. They provide simple summary statistics about different variables. Descriptive statistics of all the variables are given in Table 2. Table 2 contains the summary statistics of mean, standard deviations, frequencies and percentages of each item.

The result depicts the mean value for the first item is 3.7464, which is high. A total of 131 respondents agreed that, the number of level 1 students who obtained TP 1 and TP 2 in PBD decreases. Meanwhile, for the second item, the mean value is 3.8804, which is also high. 155 respondents agreed with the statement, the number of level 1 students obtaining TP 3 in PBD is increasing. For the third item, the mean value is at a high level of 3.698. A total of 130 respondents agreed that, the number of level 2 students who obtained TP 3 in PBD is declining. Next, the mean value of the fourth item is at a high level as well. The contribution of 156 respondents who agreed with the statement, the number of level 2 students who obtained TP 4,5, and 6 in PBD increases the mean value of 3.8995. While for the fifth item, the mean value is 3.6313, which is at a high level. 123 respondents contributed to the mean value whereby they agreed that, the number of remedial students in schools is declining. In conclusion, the average mean value for all items is 3.7713, which is at high level.

Discussions

On the basis of these results, it can be concluded that, the number of Level 1 students who obtained TP1 and TP 2 is decreasing in number. As noted in Table 1, TP 1 and TP2 is referring to minimum achievement or basic mastery of knowledge. Apparently, this finding indicates that the achievement of level 1 students is improving. This statement is supported by the finding of the second item, which is the number of students who obtained TP3 in PBD is increasing. It reveals that the number of weaker students is decreasing in number and the number of students who are at the intermediate level is increasing in number. These findings illustrate a positive scenario regarding the level of mastery of Level 1 students, in particular the Year 1,2 and 3 students in academic.

Meanwhile, for Level 2 students, the finding of the 3rd item indicates that the number of students who are at the intermediate level (TP 3) is decreasing in number. This statement is further strengthened by the finding of the fourth item whereby the number of Level 2 students who obtained TP 4,5 and 6 is increasing in number. TP4 refers to good achievement level, TP5 refers to very good achievement level and TP 6 refers to excellent achievement level. These findings point out that the achievement of Level 2 students namely the Year 4,5 and 6 is getting better. As everyone knows, the content standard for Level 2 is more complex and challenging compared to Level 1. Therefore, the findings of this study depict that despite the complex and challenging content standard, the Year 4, 5 and 6 students are still capable to master it well, very well and brilliantly. Last but not least, the finding for the fifth item is indeed reassuring. The finding has pointed out that the number of remedial students is declining. It shows that the remedial students have mastered the basic skills of reading, writing and counting and they can further progress to the next stage.

In the light of these results, it can be concluded that the achievement of all Trust School students is at a high level. After all, this data refers to the achievement of students as a whole (comprehensive) from Level 1 to Level 2 and is not focusing at certain level only. Apart from that, the indicator used to measure the level of academic achievement in this study is adapted from PBD , an assessment instrument used to continuously assess the the students summatively and formatively. On this account, it is more practical and relevant to assess students' learning.

Limitation and future research

Based on the findings of this study, the conclusion that can be made is that the level of academic performance of Trust School students is at high level. It shows that the efforts made by the Trust Schools to improve the quality of education in the country and to maximize students' performance is on the right track.

The formula of TSP success is every teacher and staff from Trust Schools, District Education Office (PPD), State Education Department (JPN), and Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE) must play their roles effectively. State and district education department should also strengthen their capacity and implementation capability (Khair, 2016).

An excellent school is a school that constantly strives to ensure all dimensions of excellence are always in line with the organizational culture (Fisher, 2012). One of the most crucial attributes of an excellent school is well-planned. Subsequently, every plan needs a clear vision based on the specified values in order to attain the intended result, which is academic performance. Therefore, the findings of this study is expected to empower the Trust School teachers to excellently continue carrying out their responsibility to educate the young generation by upholding the goals of intellectual development and moral values.

Besides, this research also adds literature in the area of academic performance of Trust School students. It also contributes to the proliferation of knowledge in the field studied because the research of TSSP is quite limited in the scope of education in Malaysia and other countries.

For future studies, it is recommended that other researchers use a larger population than this study. It is because this research involved the Primary Trust Schools from 2016 cohort only and for analysis, only teachers were involved. Thus, the results of this study do not reflect the views of the whole Trust School teachers and citizens. The involvement of a larger population is preferable as it can be generalized to all Trust Schools throughout Malaysia.

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