

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

It has been a challenge to deliver education as fair and as effectively as possible to everybody in the country. The need of education might be the same in every child, but children differ in many aspects, in term of knowledge, skills, interest, motivation, ability, and many other aspects. This situation leads to the challenge on how education should be effectively delivered, to fulfill the general need of education of various children.

Providing the best education to every individual has been a difficult task for educators in every country, since individual differences led to differences in learning. Learning could be varied in terms of method, pace, preference, and many others; hence, a suitable strategy is needed for a successful education system. One of the known methods to be more effective in delivering education is to group students based on their common attributes (Hallam, Ireson, & Davies, 2002).

There are several types of existing techniques to group students, and all of them are being used by different education system in different countries. Most of them are grouping students based on their abilities, because students with similar abilities were believed to have similar ways of learning (Kulik J. , 1992)

Out of many grouping methods, one of them has been commonly practiced in Malaysia. It is called Between-class Ability Grouping (BCAG). It is a practice of grouping students in separate classes according to their level of ability, which refers to their prior academic achievements (Slavin R. E., 2006). While other types of grouping might group students in different classes for every subject, based on the students' ability in each subject, in BCAG, students are placed in classes based on a test of their general ability, where they will remain in their streamed class for most subjects.

BCAG is practiced based on the assumption that individuals have a certain level of general intelligence that might predict their performance across all subjects, and can be measured by objective tests (Hallam, Ireson, & Davies, 2002). According to Kulik (2004), typical students in a non-grouped class might gain one year on a grade-equivalent scale in a calendar year, whereas the typical students in BCAG would gain 1.3 years; and the effects were positive for high, middle, and low groups in cross grade program.

In BCAG, teachers face students from similar levels of ability at a time, and it certainly would make it easier for the teacher to deliver the subject. School authorities are seeing that BCAG is one of the methods to escalate the academic achievement (Hallam, Ireson, & Davies, 2002). In other words, the aim of BCAG is to enhance their academic achievement. As an instructional method, BCAG is considered effective in order to gain the maximum result of academic achievement out of the best students (Kulik, 2004).

While cognitive aspects that lead to academic achievement might be the main positive factor of practicing BCAG, some studies noted its effects to non-cognitive aspects of the students. This study would like to see the relevancy of

practicing the grouping system to the non-cognitive aspects of the students. Non-cognitive aspects mentioned are self-esteem, self-efficacy, and the students' perception on teachers' behavior.

1.2 Background

Some research findings have noted that BCAG affects students' socio emotional domains, students feel stigmatized being assigned to low-achievers classes, and such feelings affect their academic achievement (Slavin, 1987). It was noted that teachers assigned in lower-achievers classes seem to have lower expectations of the students than teachers assigned in higher-achievers classes (Good, 1981), and it was reported that there is a significant relationship between teachers' expectation and students' academic achievements; the lower the expectation, the lower the academic achievement and vice versa (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968).

Social cognitive learning theory supports the non-grouped class system, where high-achievers might give a good model for the lower achievers. On the other hand, BCAG limits the good model for the lower achievers because they are not put together in a classroom. According to Slavin (1990, 2006), any educational system should avoid BCAG, because there are no research evidences that the system would significantly improve student academic achievement. Moreover, when labeled as 'lower-achievers', students are far more likely to become delinquent and truant and drop out of school compared to the other students (Goodland, 1983; Oakes, 1985)

In Malaysia, BCAG is not a formal government policy, or in other words, the Ministry of Education of Malaysia had never encouraged any schools to practice the BCAG in the classrooms. Nevertheless, BCAG is a common practice and applied to most of the schools in Malaysia. Formally the schools give different names to their classes. The name given could be nominal terms like the name of flowers or national

heroes. However, it is almost common for Malaysians to call the high-performers' class as *Kelas Hadapan* (Front-Class), and the low-performers' class as *Kelas Belakang* (Rear Class). Myers (2008) argued that students' disposition of being placed in high or low-performers' classes might serve as prior information for teachers which determine the level of teacher's expectation; a phenomenon called correspondence bias would lead the teachers to put higher expectation towards students from the high-performers' classes and lower expectation towards students from the low-performers' classes. This argument was based on the theory of attribution (Heider, 1958; Ross, 1977).

A study by Oakes (1992) discovered that because of their expectations, teachers assigned in low-performers' classes are likely to focus on control the students' behavior in order to avoid disciplinary problems, while in high-performers classes, teachers are likely to center on supporting students to get higher academic achievements. This different kind of teachers' behavior would be subjectively perceived differently by students from different classes. A qualitative study by Goods (1981) discovered that teachers assigned in the high-performers classes are more likely to support their students in improving academic achievements, while teachers assigned in the low performers' classes are more likely to control the students in order to reduce disciplinary problems.

According to the theory of symbolic interaction (Cooley, 1912; Mead, 1934), students would subjectively interpret their teacher's behavior as a main source of data about themselves, without knowing that the teacher's behavior was the product of a correspondence bias. Eventually, these perceptions would affect the way the students' self-esteem and self-efficacy.

Self-efficacy is defined as an individual's belief about his/her competence to bring about a desired outcome in a particular situation (Bandura, 1997; Santrock, 2005; Von Der Haar, 2005). Compared to self-esteem, which is concerned with judgments of self-worth, self-efficacy is concerned with judgments of personal capabilities (Woolfolk, 2007). High self-efficacy in academic achievement will help a student to believe that he/she has self-control of the outcome. It will help him/her

to study harder and avoid bad habit that might delay or distract them from having a good achievement. Low self-efficacy in academic achievement, in the opposite, will distract a student from trying harder to achieve high goals, because the student does not believe that his/her effort might give them control of the outcome.

Self-efficacy can be manipulated, and a subtle manipulation of self-efficacy can affect behavior (Levy, 1996). Manipulating self-efficacy to students could be done by giving them information about themselves. An obvious placement in a grouped class might manipulate the students' self-efficacy. When they are often exposed to a fact that they are part of a high-performers group, their self-efficacy in academic achievement might be upgraded and they will gain more beliefs that they are able to achieve high academic performance. The opposite situation might happen to the students in the low-performers' classes, where their self-efficacy in academic achievement might be degraded and reach a point where they do not believe that they can control their outcome by putting more effort; hence they will not even try any harder.

1.3 Problem Statement

BCAG has been a common practice in Malaysia. Although numerous studies have been done about BCAG, and discovered both positive and negative effects from the system, not so many has been done in Malaysia. In BCAG, some classes would be considered as high-performers' classes and some classes would be considered as low-performers' classes. Students from both classes might perceive their teachers' behavior differently; hence, the influence of those perceptions might be different from one type of class to another. This study is focusing on the influence of students' perception on teachers' behavior on the students' self-esteem and self-efficacy and the difference of self-esteem and self-efficacy between students from high and low-performers' classes in BCAG.

1.4 Research Objectives

The primary objectives of the research are as follows:

1. To identify the difference in self-esteem between the students from high and low performers classes
2. To identify the difference of self-efficacy between the students in high and low performers classes
3. To identify the difference of students' perception on teachers' controlling behavior between the students in high and low performers classes
4. To identify the difference of students' perception on teachers' supporting behavior between the students in the high and low performers classes
5. To identify the difference between perceptions on teachers' supporting behavior and teachers' controlling behavior among students within the high-performers classes
6. To identify the difference between perceptions on teachers' supporting behavior and teachers' controlling behavior among students within the low-performers classes
7. To identify the influence of students' perception on teachers' controlling and supporting behavior on students' self-esteem.
8. To identify the influence of students' perception on teachers' controlling and supporting behavior on students' self-efficacy.

1.5 Research Questions and Null Hypotheses

The research questions and null hypotheses for each question are reported in the table 1.1. Research questions number 7 and 8 needed 3 hypotheses for each of the question due to the possibility of having difficulty during statistical analysis.

Table 1.1: Research Questions and Hypotheses

No	Research Questions	Null Hypotheses
1	Is there any significant difference in self-esteem level of the students in the high and low performers' classes of BCAG?	There is no significant difference in self-esteem level of the students in the high and low performers' classes
2	Is there any significant difference in self-efficacy level of the students in the high and low performers' classes of BCAG?	There is no significant difference in self-efficacy level of the students in the high and low performers' classes
3	Is there any significant difference in perception on teachers' controlling behavior between the students in the high and low performers' classes of BCAG?	There is no significant difference in perception on teachers' controlling behavior between the students in the high and low performers' classes
4	Is there any significant difference in perception on teachers' supporting behavior between the students in the high and low performers' classes of BCAG?	There is no significant difference in perception on teachers' supporting behavior between the students in the high and low performers' classes
5	Is there any significant difference between perception on teachers' supporting behavior and teachers' controlling behavior among students within the high-performers' classes?	There is no significant difference between perception on teachers' supporting behavior and teachers' controlling behavior among students within the high-performers' classes.
6	Is there any significant difference between perception on teachers' supporting behavior and teachers' controlling behavior among students within the low-performers' classes?	There is no significant difference between perception on teachers' supporting behavior and teachers' controlling behavior among students within the low-performers' classes.
7	Is there any significant influence of students' perception on teachers' controlling and supporting behavior on students' self-esteem?	(a) There is no significant influence of students' perception on teachers' controlling and supporting behavior on students' from low-performers classes' self-esteem.
		(b) There is no significant influence of students' perception on teachers'

		controlling and supporting behavior on students' from high-performers classes' self-esteem.
		(c) There is no significant influence of students' perception on teachers' controlling and supporting behavior on students' from both high and low-performers classes' self-esteem.
8	Is there any significant influence of students' perception on teachers' controlling and supporting behavior on students' self-efficacy?	(a) There is no significant influence of students' perception on teachers' controlling and supporting behavior on students' from low-performers classes' self- efficacy.
		(b) There is no significant influence of students' perception on teachers' controlling and supporting behavior on students' from high-performers classes' self- efficacy.
		(c) There is no significant influence of students' perception on teachers' controlling and supporting behavior on students' from both high and low-performers classes' self- efficacy.

1.6 The Importance of the Study

Information on the influence of students' perception on teachers' behavior on students' self-esteem and self-efficacy might enrich the literacy of BCAG and students-teachers relationships. Moreover, the teachers, schools, and other educational stakeholders, including the parents would be aware of the differences that might come up as results of the influence of teachers' behavior, especially under the BCAG environment. Such knowledge might help the educators to have suitable instructional methods to each type of the class for the benefit of every student.

1.7 Scope and Limitation of the Study

The study is focusing on the students of public secondary schools (*Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan / SMK*), which are located in the area of Permas Jaya, district of Pasir Gudang, state of Johor, Malaysia, in term of:

1. Self-Esteem
2. Self-Efficacy
3. Perception in Teachers' Controlling Behavior
4. Perception in Teachers' Supporting Behavior

The study is also focusing on the difference within students in high-performers and low-performers' classes in term of:

1. Perception of teachers' controlling behavior
2. Perception of teachers' supporting behavior

Another focus of this study is on the influence of students' perception of teachers' controlling behavior and supporting behavior on self-esteem and self-efficacy.

This study does not control the extraneous variables that might involve, such as students' physical conditions, social economic status, gender, or any other dispositional differences that might influence their levels in term of the variables mentioned in this study.

1.8 Conceptual Framework

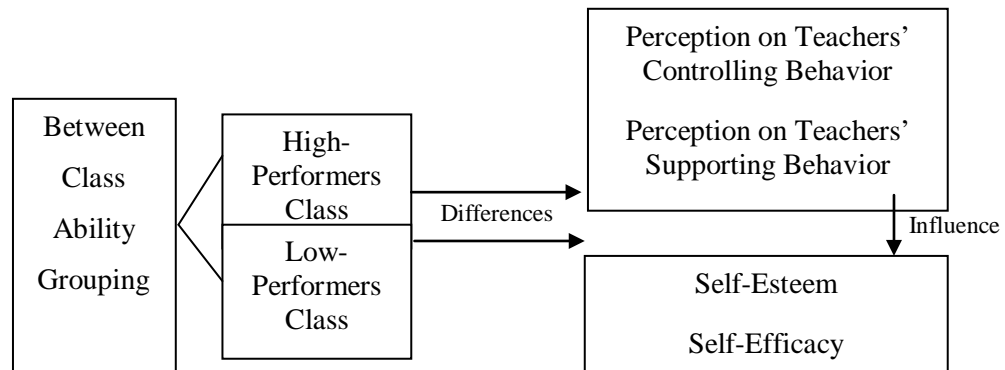


Figure 1.1 Conceptual Framework

This study looks at the difference between students from high and low performers' classes in self-esteem, self-efficacy, perception on teachers' controlling behavior, and perception on teachers' supporting behavior. It is also looking at the influence of students' perception on teachers' controlling and supporting behavior on self-esteem and self-efficacy.

1.9 Theoretical Framework

The BCAG is merely an instructional strategy, aimed at creating conducive learning environment for students of quite similar performance level. This study is investigating the socio emotional aspects of the students by looking at the differences between highest and lowest group in BCAG in term of self-esteem, self-efficacy, and perception on teachers' behavior.

According to symbolic Interaction Theory by Cooley (1912), a person would subjectively interpret others' behavior as a main source of data about themselves, without knowing that the others' behavior was the product of a fundamental attribution error. In other words, Cooley's theory stated that it was not others' behavior that determined one's self-esteem or self-efficacy, it is one's perception of others' behavior toward themselves that determined one's self-esteem or self-efficacy.

Figure 1.2 illustrates the flow of how students from high and low-performers' classes of BCAG interpret the teachers' behavior as the teachers' expectation towards the students, which might influence their self-esteem and self-efficacy.

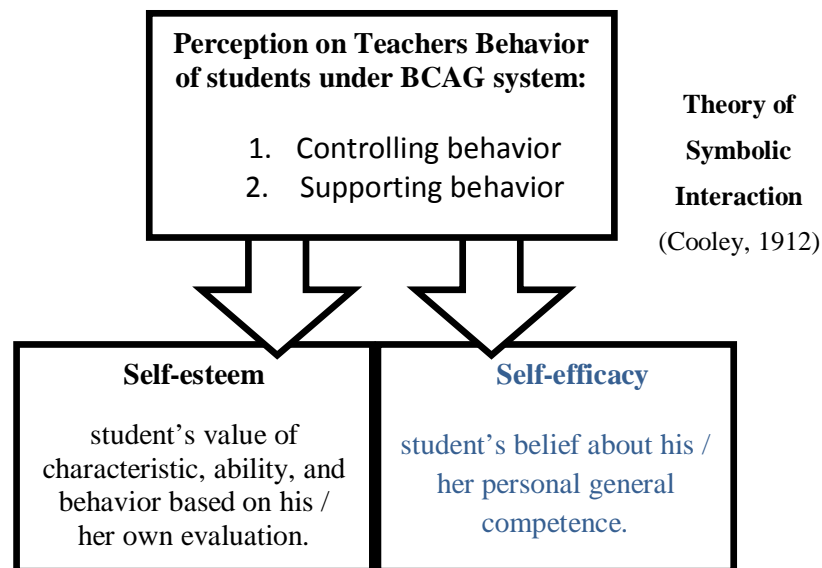


Figure 1.2: Theoretical Framework

1.10 Definition of Key terms

Several key terms will be conceptually and operationally defined in this sub-chapter. Those key terms are BCAG, self-esteem, self-efficacy, students' perception on teacher's behavior, academic achievement, and students' preference of ability grouping system.

1.10.1 Between-Class Ability Grouping

The definition of BCAG is the practice of grouping students in separate classes according to ability level (Slavin R. E., 2006). Some schools have their own standards, but for most of the schools, *ability* is often measured by the academic performance. (Kulik J. A., 2004).

In this study, BCAG is defined as a system of grouping students in Malaysian Secondary Schools, based on students' previous academic achievements.

1.10.2 Self Esteem

Self Esteem is an individual's evaluation of his/her self worth. (Von Der Haar, 2005) It is also defined as the value each individuals place on own characteristics, abilities, and behavior. (Woolfolk, 2007). In all cases, self-esteem results from an evaluation of oneself. (Larsen & Buss, 2008). According to Larsen & Buss (2008), self-esteem measures of many areas are moderately correlated. A person with high self-esteem in one area also tends to have high self-esteem in the other areas as well.

In this study, self-esteem is defined as a student's value of characteristic, ability, and behavior based on his / her own evaluation.

1.10.3 Self-Efficacy

Self-Efficacy is defined as a person's belief about one's own personal competence in a particular subject and situation (Von Der Haar, 2005; Woolfolk, 2007). Works of Bandura explained self-efficacy as beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments (Bandura, 1997).

In this study, self-efficacy is defined as a student's belief about his / her personal competence in academic performance and other areas related to academic performance and his / her being placed at the front class or rear class in BCAG system.

1.10.4 Students' perception on teachers' behavior

Students' perception towards their teacher's behavior defined as students' assumption on what their teachers would expect them to be like. Perceptions are selective and are often a result of the distortions engendered by motives, goals, attitudes, and defense mechanisms (Bruner & Goodman, 1947); hence teacher's behavior might affect how students' perception about the teacher.

1.10.4.1 Students' perception on teachers' controlling behavior

Students' perception on their teachers' controlling behavior defined a perception from the students that their teachers are more likely to be focused on control of student disruptions, hostility, and alienation, while their relationship with students in high-performers classes are likely to center on supporting students to get higher academic achievements (Oakes, 1985).

In this study, Students' perception on teacher's controlling behavior refers to the students' perception that their teachers are more likely to control the students' behavior in order to maintain the discipline in the classroom.

1.10.4.2 Students' perception on teachers' supporting behavior

Students' perception on their teachers' supporting behavior defined a perception from the students that their teachers are more likely to be focused on improving the students' academic achievements (Oakes, 1985).

In this study, Students' perception on teacher's controlling behavior refers to the students' perception that their teachers are more likely to support the students in order to improve their academic achievement.

1.11 Conclusion

This chapter had discussed about the background, objectives, questions, hypotheses, the importance, scope and limitation, theoretical framework, conceptual framework of the study and the definitions of variables involved. The next chapter will discuss about the theories and literacy behind each variables.