



The Impact of Social Class and Ability Group on Students Academic Achievement: a Case Study of Selected Primary Schools

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ABSTRACT

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Ability group system (AGS) can be understood as grouping students according to their academic abilities. There are pros and cons of the ability group implementation in schools. However, this system is still practised in modern national educational systems. The present study explored the impact of students' socioeconomic status (SES) and the AGS implementation on selected primary students' academic achievement. The research utilised the qualitative method and followed a case study design confined to a selected primary school that implemented the ability group system in their teaching and learning process. A total of 12 informants were selected using the purposive sampling technique. The sample consisted of four teachers with experience adopting ability groups in the teaching and learning process and eight parents who have children in different ability level classes. Data was obtained using semi-structured interviews, non-participant classroom observation, and document analysis. The findings demonstrate that SES background and AGS could impact students' academic performance. Therefore, this study suggested that the improving of group ability implementation in schools is crucial, such as teaching method and strategies that teacher use in different level of group ability should be improved. Also schools should provide a sufficient training for teacher to implement group ability system.



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A. INTRODUCTION

The practice of placing students into homogeneous grouping, such as ability grouping, achievement placing and tracking, have been debated and practiced in schools since the early 1800's, yet it is practiced in many educational systems all over the world. Group ability can be understood as a type of standardized grouping, which simply means the grouping together of students who have similar ability level based on their academic performance as the measurement. One prime aim of this practice is to enable students to learn according their own abilities and pace. It is argued however that, ability grouping usually works in favour of high achievements and does not necessarily improve all students' academic performance. It unfairly limits the educational opportunities of disadvantaged students (McGillicuddy & Devine, 2020).

Therefore, there are the pros and cons of group ability implementation in schools. The proponents of ability grouping argued that by practicing group ability it allows teachers to plan teaching strategies, contents, class instructions better according to the students' needs. It is also an effort to improve students' academic achievement (Risdiyanto, 2021). Moreover, opponents of group ability argue that there are negative results of this implementation as stated by Muir 2008. He believes that students in low group ability tend to receive lower-quality instruction. Also, students in low group ability have difficulty moving out of low performing groups to join higher achieving groups.

In addition, there are some benefits which were explained by proponents of heterogeneous grouping such as: (a) a well-prepared instructor; (b) procrastinations of time will be less; (c) students will be on task and monitoring will not be difficult; (d) the whole class will receive the same instructions; and (e) everyone will have the same chance to learn and it will eliminate prejudgment of students' achievement and foster respect and importance of each individual in the group, (Webel & Dwiggin, 2019).

Impact, the group ability implementation is related with other factors, since students grouped based on the academic ability, it links to their socio-economic background. According to Jean and (Croizet & Millet, 2011), stated that, there are the relationship between ability or academic performance and social class. The term of "Social-Class", is simply can be understood as a group of people within a society who possess the same socio-economic status (SES). Sociologists generally posit three class categories: (1) Upper/elite class, this upper class in societies is often distinguished by the possession of largely inherited wealth; (2) Middle class, which includes managers, small businesses, professionals and the middle ranks of the state apparatus; (3) Working class, which includes the great majority of the population who sell their labour power, their capacity to work, in return for a wage or salary, and who work under the direction of the owners of the means of production and their agents (Ferjan M. & Jereb, 2014).

Moreover, sociologist argued that the level of intelligence is cause by ones social class status. Children from lower class unable have a good performance because they grow up in environments characterized by strong material deprivation and substandard schooling, which prevents the normal development of their cognitive abilities. In addition (Denice, 2022) have identified different causes of inequality in education. This includes: social class, family economic status, educational level and the social prestige. Thus, students' social background plays an important role in students' learning performance.

Furthermore (Doddy, 2015) stated that the sociologist Karl Marx (1818-1813) believes that education system is reproducing social classes, it is because the students who with low academic results have least social mobility as compared to those students who have high academic results. He also support the argument that "Education reproduces the attitudes and behavior for divisions of labor. It teaches people how to accept their position, to be exploited, and to show the rulers how to control the workforce" (p.03). Consistently, as argued by opponents of group ability that group ability promotes segregation in the classroom along both racial and socioeconomic lines. It is also argued that high ability grouped classrooms receive a disproportionately large amount of resources, and the gap between achievement levels becomes exaggerated over time. Finally, group ability can result in a social stigmatism for lower achieving students, which has been shown to affect academic performance (Gwenda Walters, 2021).

According to (Denice, 2022) however, most of the time different educational systems assess students by grades and test scores without taking into consideration students' social status. The same thing happens, when schools practice the group ability system, students will be placed in

class according to their previous academic result, which is in fact the outcome of their social background. According to (Irizarry, 2021) social stratification is directly associated with the practice of group ability. He claimed that the students, who are placed in lower achievements class, are more likely to be those who come from minority groups or from low socioeconomic status (SES) background. Moreover, he stated that group ability is a problematic practice because it is associated with social segregation and it will have an effect on student's achievement. Over the time group ability is commonly linked with expanding inequality of student performance, which mean student who have good achievement gain more and more and excel while students with low achievement fall further and further behind. It is observed that the only category which benefit from this practice in the middle group.

(Risdiyanto, 2021), stated that group ability does not only fail to benefit all student, but it also channels the poor and minority students to low group of placement, where they receive a lower quality of instruction than other groups. The claim is that this will contribute to widening the achievement gaps. Social theorists suggest that there are at least three important categories of processes that are responsible for this differential achievement gap. First, the contributions of economic, cultural, and social capital resources, second, direct and indirect influences of discrimination by persons and institutions within the educational system, third and last, the contributions of particular kinds of behavioural interactions between dominants and subordinates (McGillicuddy & Devine, 2020).

To conclude it is generally believed that, social class, group ability and students' academic achievement are interconnected. Firstly, students' family social class have has a big impact in determining their academic achievements in school. This will create a gap in the academic achievements between students. As a result, the practice of group ability system (homogeneous class) in school is based on previous students' academic results, while there some factors that influence students' academic result, family social class (socio-economic) is one among them. From the existing literature, it is evident that much has been discussed about how students' social class affects their academic performance, how group ability system affects students' academic achievement. However, research specifically concerning how social class, group ability implementation in school and students' academic achievement are interconnected. Hence, the main objective of this study is to explore the impact of students' socio-economic background and group ability implementation on students' academic achievement. The research question that guided this study as follows: To what extent do group ability and students' socio-economic background affect their academic achievement?

B. METHODS

This study is employed a qualitative research approach, (Denzin et al., 2005), describe a qualitative research is multi-method in focus, involving an interpretative, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in term of the meaning that people bring to them. It personal experience, introspective, live story interview, observation, historical, interactional and visual text-that describe routine problematic moments and meaning in individual's live.

Furthermore, case study research design was chosen because of it is fitness with the research objectives and its ability to convey an in-depth understanding of an individual's daily life and the meaning and explanations of individual experiences (Creswell, 2012). According to (Creswell, 2012) the case study approach aims is "to gain in-depth understanding of the

situation and meaning for those involved". (p. 39). Thus, the use of case study approach in this research would provide the researcher in-depth information pertaining to the practice of group ability and how it is related to social class and its impact on the students' academic achievement. A combination of interviews, documents analysis and classroom observations are appropriate for achieving the goal of the study. Semi-structure interviews with participants (teachers and parents) constitute the main data sources and these are supplemented by reviews made of documents and casual classroom observation.

1. Participants

The number of participants selected for this study was limited to (12) twelve participants; (four teachers and eight parents) as recommended by (Creswell, 2012) who urged that the qualitative research should have a few number of participants, ranging from 1-40, as having larger number of participants raises challenges for data management and data analysis. Thus purposive selection of key participants and target group will be identified for data collection. The target group is comprised four teachers and eight parents. The reason for choosing teachers as participants in this study is because the teachers are responsible for the implementation of group ability in the school, while parents are also considered as appropriate to be participants because from the parents researcher can find out the students' social economic background as well as how parents perceive about ability group in school.

2. Data Collection

The data for research work were collected by researcher herself by visiting the selected schools.

a. Semi-Structured Interview

The researcher will conduct interviews with four (4) teachers and eight (8) parent participants. The interview with the teachers is to understand their perceptions and experiences on the practice of ability group and how they use various techniques and strategies teaching and learning resources, lesson activities for class in group ability system. In addition, the interview with the parents is to uncover their socio-economic status (SES), their perception on group ability system in schools and their level of satisfactions related to their children's academic achievements. Moreover, the goal of this interview is to unravel some valuable hidden data about both teacher and parents in terms of their beliefs, perceptions, and experiences regarding the impact of implementation group ability and social status on students' academic achievement.

b. Classroom Observations

The classroom observation will be conducted a few days before the interview of the participants. It is enabling the researcher to draw comparison as to whether the participants' responses during the interview are in line with the observable classroom interaction or not.

c. Documents Analysis

Beside the interview and classroom observation, document analysis is also going to be used as instrument to enrich the data collected from participants. The documents to be analysed consist of the student's exercise books, note taking and students' result reports. The students' result report analysis documents will be used to get the data regarding students' achievements while the text books will be showed how it usage for different level of ability classes.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The analysis is following the qualitative research reporting procedure, which was defined by the acronym DCR. (Describe, Compare and Relate) (Alhojailan, 2012). Therefore, the findings of the research were presented by describing the emergent themes and sub-themes then making comparisons verbatim from the informants and by relating or contrasting the findings with the literature and the research in the relevant area of study. The emergent main theme was 'The Impact of Social Class and Group Ability on Students Academic Achievement'. Therefore, the analysis and the discussion of the data collected is presented for research question in line with the main themes and sub-themes that emerged.

According to the finding all teachers agreed that social class and group ability affect the students' academic achievement because of several reasons. Among the reasons that teachers deliver were: different level of parents' socio-economic status affect their support on children learning process and it directly affect students achievements and class group placements as well. Also, the difference amount of tuition fee is a proof of the real relationship between students' socio-economic background and the group ability implementation in school. These finding is supported by the finding from the class obsevation, it found that Group ability is benefit high ability class which that most of the students in this class are from high socio-economic background. It is because high ability students received more subjects, activities and longer school duration time.

Furthermore, it probes deeper, teachers' statements of their point of view toward the claim that student's division in different learning group is in fact based on their socio-economic background. Surprisingly, all teachers agreed with the claim. According to the teachers academic test result and family's SES background were two main factors that school take consideration to group students. Also, teachers admitted that there was no one students from low SES among the high achievers.

Moreover, it found that most of the parents believed that their current living conditions affect their children performance in school, and they stated some reasons how this relationship is real. The main reason that giving by parents is 'the parents' ability to provide school needs, because they believe it will affect some factors of children's learning process, such as motivation and at the same time it will affect their academic achievement and the group placement as well. In addition, most of the students' low ability class parents admitted that they need their children to help them to make money especially during school break. As shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Example statements about social class and group ability impact on students' academic achievement

Social Class, Group Ability And Academic Achievement Example Statements
Teachers' Perception
"..yes, there is a relationship, parent's socio-economic level affect how they support their children's learning process and its affect the children's academic achievement"
"..yes, there is the relationship.." "...since the tuition payment is different, it is more expensive for high ability class compare to the low ability class.."
"yes, for me there is the relationship.."
"Yes, there is, because beside the academic result also from the fford of parents because the pay is different, in the lower ability class is lower."
"yes, I have" " Not even poor, it is moderate so .."
"Yes it has a relationship or influence ... this grouping is influential. ..socio-economic status parent will influence how parents pay attention on their children learning process and it has an influence on the child's achievement.."

“ yes it influential, because it will children motivation and interest to learn..” if we look the children from the high SES, automatically there is the difference, such as parents have ability to send their children for paid extra classes,

Parents' Perception

“.. if I able to provide all his school need he feels motivated, and it will affect his academic achievement, while if I unable to provide it will decrease his motivation to study..” (Hawa).

“..yes of course” “.. it is because if I able to provide their learning aid, they will be better academically, and easier for them to continue to next level of education..” (Diana)

“Yes influential..” “..for example in terms of food, we can eat more nutritious food, for example, not only covered in chili,..” “ Yes, malnourished..” (Uda)

“..yes he always helping me in preparing..”(Huda/DU 35).

“I need my child help in money making, and they always help me” (Fina).

“ yes he help me” (Uda).

Additionally, the finding from the document analysis which that the result of midterm test for subject English and mathematic from different ability level classes showed the big differences. High ability class English midterm result showed all students get >80 and above for both theory and practice, while for low ability with the same subject showed that only one student get 80 mark and most of them get < 50 mark for about 20 students from 34 students in a class. Moreover, for mathematic subject, high ability class midterm result showed the highest mark is 90 and the average class mark was between 65-75, while for low ability class mathematic result found that only four students got > 60 mark and five students only get 5 mark and this the lowest mark (DOC,1,2,3,4).

Moreover, it was found that all teacher participants believe that students' family socio-economic background affect their academic achievement at the same time it affects their group learning in school. Also, parent participants agreed that their family socio-economic status affects the way they support their children' academic progress, such as in term of providing aid learning and so on. Based on the documents analysis also showed that there was a big gap in academic achievement between different levels. Indeed, based on the result of the study, the implementation of group ability is required to improve.

D. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This study support the finding of research that have done by (Doddy, 2015) explained that group ability affect the teachers' motivation in teaching certain class such as unwilling, do not have enthusiasm and feel unhappy to teach the middle and lower class. Also, this study in line with (Purwanto. A, 2011) who emphasized that the implementation of group ability system (GAS) is only added to sharp social inequality in society. It is because those students that unable to continue their study to next level will have a big possibility to inherit the poverty. Therefore, it identified that there are the real interconnection between group ability, students' family socio-economic and their academic performance in school.

Moreover, this study is proven to what have found by researches such as (Muir, 2008) that the negative impact of group ability system (GAS) stated that grouping students based on their ability is create different teachers' expectations classes. Thus, students in low class might be received different instructions, cover less content and a lot of repetition. (Irizarry, 2021), stressed that group ability implementation could not measure by students' academic achievements alone, it is because social stratification is directly associated with the practice of group ability. It found that the students, who are placed in lower achievements class, are more likely to be those who come from minority groups or from low socioeconomic status (SES)

background (Santoso, 2017), (Rinawati, 2017) who hypothesized that, students' academic achievements are lead to their family socio-economic status (Tezel-Sahim, 2011) group ability implementation in schools is link to several social factors, such as parents' education level, gender, race or ethnicity, marital status, occupation, social status and socioeconomic background and so on.

Practical implications of the results of this study can be formulated. First, the teachers differ in their opinion about whether students should be learning in homogeneous or heterogeneous group. Thus, not all the teachers support the GAS implementation. Second, parents have a clear understanding about group ability implementation in their school children. Overall, all the parents opined that there are unbalanced practice between ability level classes. Impact, the parents who have children in high ability class showed their attitude to support the GAS implementation in their children schools. While, other parents unsatisfied with this GAS implementation is because of economic problem. For the next researcher is suggested to explore the implementation of group ability in other level of education such as in secondary school. Also it is suggested to explore the impact of group ability implementation with factors such as students' motivation and self-esteem.

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