Factors Contributing to Poor Academic Achievement among Low Performing Pupils: A Case Study

Mallika Vasugi Govindarajoo[1*], Navina D.Selvarajoo[2] , Mohd Sofi Ali[3]

[1] [2] [3]Faculty of Education and Humanities,
UNITAR International University, Malaysia
mallika@unitar.my
navy2pooja@gmail.com
mohd.sofi@unitar.my
*Corresponding Author

Abstract: Despite numerous efforts by the Malaysian Ministry of Education to raise educational quality especially in the wake of the Covid 19 pandemic, the number of low-performing pupils in Malaysian schools remains a serious concern. Additionally, the number of pupils' dropping out has increased during the period of online facilitation. This qualitative case study examines factors contributing to poor academic achievement among low performing pupils. Also, it explored the strategies to overcome those factors. Sampling was purposeful as this study required the views of both those who were directly part of the low-performing group either as students or educators. Five teachers and five low academic performing pupils were chosen as participants from a Malaysian primary school. Data was gathered through scheduled semi-structured interviews with teachers and pupils. The study sought to explore the factors that contribute to poor academic achievement, and those which are frequently overlooked. The findings revealed that the main factors related to pupils with low academic performance, were lack of family or parental support, financial issues, motivation, learning facilities, interaction, equality and teaching techniques. These findings will help teachers, school administrators, curriculum designers and developers to plan new teaching and learning strategies in their classrooms.

Keywords: Academic achievement, Equality, Learning facilities, Motivation

1. Introduction

Malaysia's National Education Philosophy states that the goal of education is to produce knowledgeable and competent citizens who can think and act wisely while maintaining high moral standards to ensure the harmony and betterment of their family and country. Education is essential for every individual to enhance their critical thinking skills which are pivotal in decision making and interacting with others. Most importantly, to achieve the fundamental work criteria and guarantee a more promising future. the Ministry of Education in Malaysia has introduced initiatives to improve school performance (Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025) to ensure that pupils have access to a comprehensive set of modules and instructional strategies that will allow them to make significant strides in their education and overall concerns.

Malaysia's Education Act 1996 mandates every child in Malaysia the right to primary education in order to produce literate citizens who are also skilled. This will in turn be able to position

Malaysia as a centre for educational excellence. Despite the opportunities and multiple programmes offered for the pupil, low performing pupil are still a concern in our country. Low-performing pupils continue to struggle to learn, to achieve higher Level of Mastery *Tahap Penguasaan* (TP) or to fulfil the objectives and goals of their studies and education in the majority of local schools. Malaysian education policies are constantly being revised to produce an adequate number of quality pupils to meet current educational demands (Tai M.K., et al, 2020). However, even though school reformation began with a revision of the curriculum, techniques, and management, the outcomes of the initiatives have been inconsistent or limited in producing high-performing pupils and quality pupil progress (Harris et al., 2018).   Even the upgrading to a new learning environment produced little results with only a small group of low-performing pupils improving their learning skills by making use of the opportunities that were provided or available. The majority of the low-performing pupils however, still found it a challenge to get good grades in their GPMP (*Gred Purata Mata Pelajaran*-Average Grade of the Subject) and achieve the minimum standards in examinations and education. The situation worsened with the increase in the number of pupils dropping out when lessons turned to the online mode and when pupils began secondary schooling. Cashman et al. (2021) also found that there was lower participation by parents in the education of low performing pupils. Among the contributing factors were the educational background of parents themselves, financial constraints, commitment to irregular working hours, and dysfunctional or broken homes. Other related issues that were found to contribute to the low performance included discipline issues at school, behavioural problems at home, influence of gangsterism, and the need to begin working at an early age. This was further compounded by the lack of support and guidance given to this group of pupils towards the development of their education and the significant disparity between the privileges offered to high-performing and low-performing pupils.

1.1   Objective of this study

Despite the Ministry of Education, school administration, and teachers' continuous improvement initiatives   to ensure the success and achievement of these low performing pupils, this group of students continues to encounter challenges in their learning. Hence, this study aims to examine further the contributing and other overlooked factors that lead to poor academic achievement of these low academic performing pupils. This research is also designed to explore teachers' current and possible classroom strategies to assist this group of pupils to effectively improve on their academic achievement.

1.2   Research Questions

The following research questions are addressed in the study:

1. What are the factors that contribute to poor academic achievement among low-performing pupils?
2. What are the factors that have been overlooked which contribute to poor academic achievement among low-performing pupils?
3. What are teachers' classroom strategies in managing low-performing pupils?

2.   Literature Review

2.1   Low-performing pupils' perceptions towards own learning

Pupils' perceptions of learning and their behaviour patterns both in and out of school have a significant impact on their performance. Low-performing pupils are frequently portrayed as lacking the engagement, drive, and self-belief required to succeed in school (OECD, 2016).

Self-motivation is a critical component of academic progress and achievement. According to a study by Demir, Can and Ceyhan (2019), an individual can have multiple types of motivation at different levels at the same time and exhibit a variety of profiles based on these motivational features.

This study's findings are similar to those of Jung, Zhou, and Lee (2017), who discussed the importance of self-directed learning as a critical contributor to pupils' academic progress. A motivated pupil will work hard to achieve a perfect score and develop a positive attitude toward their learning skills and process. A study on the educational influence of Latino immigrant adolescents' school social relationships revealed that pupils have adverse experiences during their adolescence, such as negative internalization and incorrect stereotypes (Lee, Dean, and Kim, 2017).

2.2   Impact of Family Background and Support

Another contributing factor towards the under achievement and decreased motivation of low-performing pupils in school is family poverty. Studies by Kendal (2018) and Rajendram and Kendal (2020) have shown that children in low-income families internalize their parents' struggle with hopelessness, difficulties, shame, and inferiority. As a result of this internalization, young children see their own lives as devoid of aspiration and dreams. Poverty has also affected pupils' school attendance Many pupils belonging to the B40 group (Bottom 40% of income earners) in Malaysia arrive at school without proper nourishment or even on an empty stomach, and some cannot afford to eat during recess. This makes it difficult for children to concentrate during classroom lessons. Furthermore, low-income pupils cannot afford supplemental academic aid such as reference books or extra-curricular activities. This situation widens the gap between pupils from well-off families and those living in poverty (Vigneswararao, 2019).

Family support is critical in the educational development of pupils. In 2013, toolkits in the form of a framework for parents to assess their deficiencies and strengths to participate in and focus on their children's education from four perspectives were introduced as national initiatives to encourage parents' involvement in their children's education matters (Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013). According to Oswald, Omar, Arul and Philips (2018), parents' involvement in their children's education is also influenced by the parents' marital status. According to their findings, single-parent involvement in their children's educational development is significantly lower as compared to those having both parents. Cashman, et.al. (2021) discovered a correlation between low -performing pupils and the low parental involvement among those with financial constraints. Yet another study revealed that the academic qualifications of the mother was significant in determining the level of parental involvement and subsequently children's educational achievements. (Yulianti, Denessen & Droop, 2020).

2.3.   Teachers' Attitudes and Professionalism

Teachers' engagement and training should be consistent with the Ministry of Education's (MOE) goal of producing professional, qualified, and experienced teachers who will be a valuable investment in meeting the country's needs and demands. This necessitates significant changes and modifications to the current educational system and teaching methods. Unfortunately, teachers are dissatisfied with these changes. Teachers' attitudes toward change are a source of concern that contributes to a lack of professionalism among teachers (Abu Hassan, Rabbani, Shukor and Abdul Majid, 2018). In addition, many teachers are slow to adapt. There is a need for school administrators to consistently emphasize the importance of improving teachers' attitudes towards transformation (Tai and Omar, 2017).

According to the Ministry of Education, Malaysia, teachers play a critical role in determining a pupil's success or failure. Teachers should be well-versed in dealing with and supporting pupils in low-performing categories. A pupil's knowledge is highly dependent on the teacher's expertise, pedagogy, knowledge, attitude and ability to teach and make the lesson understandable. The teacher's awareness and attitudes measure pupil success (Yasin & Pau, 2021).

Malaysian education policies are constantly being revised to produce an adequate number of quality pupils to meet current educational demands (Tai et al, 2020b). However, even though school reformation began with a revision of the curriculum, techniques, and management, the outcomes of the initiatives have been inconsistent or limited in producing high-performing pupils and quality pupil progress (Harris, Jones & Huffman., 2018).

In response to widespread concerns about low performing pupils and school performance in Malaysia, the Malaysia Education Blueprint (2013) includes numerous improvements to produce successful pupils. However, according to the Harris and Jones (2017) study, certain contextual variables such as underinvestment, poverty, and disadvantages prevent a school from adequately meeting the needs of its pupils and from operating effectively.

In 2021 according to Malaysia World News, the Ministry of Education received RM52.6 billion, or 16% of total Federal Government expenditures (Daud, 2021). RM450 million has been set aside for early schooling assistance and maintenance funding which will benefit three million pupils and 10,000 schools nationwide, , Another RM450 million was allocated for, amongst other needs, the supply of Malaysian Family Students' Devices when students were required to study from home and payment discounts for National Higher Education Fund Corporation, abbreviated PTPTN, *Perbadanan Tabung Pendidikan Tinggi Nasional*

2.4   School Conditions

Further studies by Delfino (2019) concluded that the teacher, the school, and the parents should have strong collaboration to provide more opportunities for students. Apart from parental involvement, family support, motivation and financial issues, other factors that have been identified to influence pupils' academic performance or advancement are school size, location, class size, relationships between teachers and pupils, and amenities such as libraries and laboratories (Chong, 2020) In her study, Chong (2020) also discovered that a school's physical attributes had a variety of effects on teachers, pupils, and the learning process. Issues such as poor lighting, excessive noise in the classroom, inconsistent temperature as well as poorly maintained and inefficient ventilation systems were related to teaching and learning difficulties besides having a negative effect on the health of pupils and teachers. The consequences were reduced teaching and learning effectiveness, increase in absenteeism, higher stress levels among teachers and poorer academic attitude among pupils. Other studies have concurred that learning in poor conditions will undoubtedly impede pupils' growth and limit their ability to apply creative ideas in tasks such as composition, writing and drawing. The learning environment has also been linked closely with the development of learner behavior. Ultimately, an unfavorable learning environment can cause inattention, demotivation to study, and a loss of interest in education (Chong, 2020).

3.   Methodology

3.1   Conceptual Framework

This study is anchored on Walberg's Theory of Educational Productivity (1981). In his theory, Walberg (1981) tries to determine the factors that influence student performance. He establishes that psychological characteristics of individual students and their immediate psychological environments influence educational outcomes. Nine key variables were identified. They were student ability/prior achievement, motivation, age/developmental level, quantity of instruction, quality of instruction, classroom climate, home environment, peer group, and exposure to mass media outside of school (Walberg, Fraser, & Welch, 1986).

This study intends to further investigate the factors that influence the poor academic performance of low-performing pupils. The following conceptual framework (Diagram 1) presents the key concepts this study wishes to explore. The primary contributing variables to poor academic achievement have been formed in a diagram and discussed based on the studies that have been emphasized in this study's literature review.
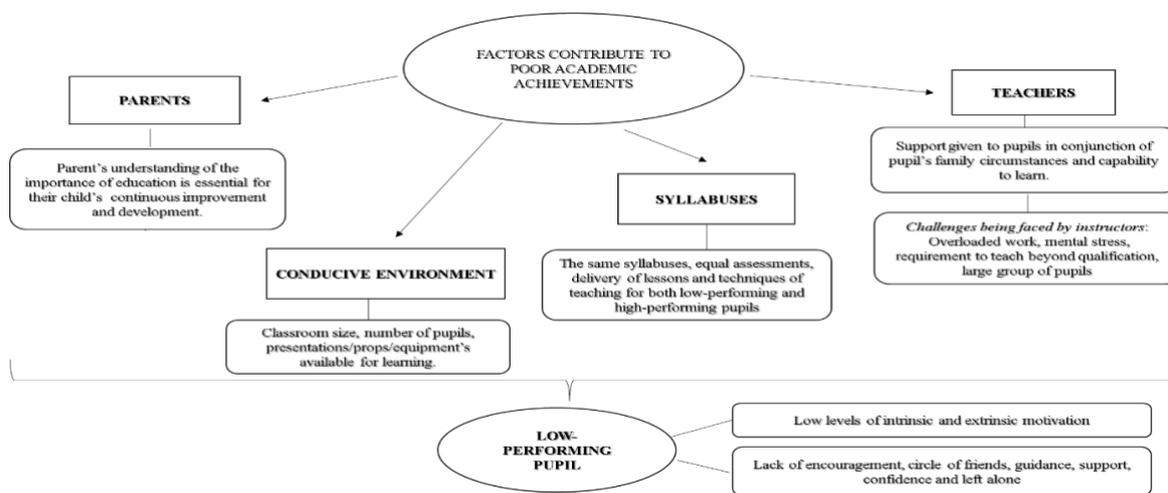
Fig. 1 Conceptual Framework of the Study

.

Parents have a significant influence on their children's educational achievement and progress (Oswald, et.al, 2018; Cashman, et.al, 2021). Their understanding of the importance of education in their child's life is essential for their continuous improvement and development.

Teachers have an equal impact on pupils' lives. Teachers' involvement in pupils' development improves their academic performance overall (Abu Hassan, et.al, 2018; Yasin & Pau, 2021). Understanding their circumstances and family background, pupils' capability to grasp the knowledge and provide adequate support for their educational development will influence their progress.

A welcoming environment is essential in encouraging pupils to return to school. A comfortable classroom space, the number of pupils in each classroom, the appearance of the classroom, and the equipment provided for active learning and instruction all play a role in pupils learning (Chong, 2020).

Furthermore, the syllabuses for low-performing and high-performing pupils are the same. Pupils from low-performing backgrounds might find it challenging to understand and grasp the knowledge if they are required to complete the same activities and tasks as high-performing pupils. It may also result in a child's low self-esteem and confidence. This situation worsens when high, and low-performing pupils are graded and evaluated equally in the examination and the presence of ranking and pupil position in class based on exam grades.

All these factors can have a negative impact on pupils' education achievement and progress resulting in poor academic performance.

3.2   Research Design

As this study aimed to investigate and elicit in-depth the factors that contribute to poor academic achievement among low-performing pupils, a qualitative case study research design was used. Yin (2017) explains case studies in detail as the investigation of "a current phenomenon in detail and within its actual context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and setting are not readily visible." In this study, this design enabled the researchers to collect in-depth data to investigate the factors contributing to poor achievement among low-performing pupils in a Malaysian primary school, and reveal many unknown aspects and ideas to overcome the situation.

To the researchers, the most effective procedure was to approach the participants involved, the teachers, and pupils, in order to understand their experiences, perspectives and concerns relevant to the situation. Apart from enabling the researchers to investigate and obtain in-depth information that may not have been elicited otherwise, this approach also provided insight into the development of successful learning improvements for low-performing pupils.

3.3   The School Context

The study was carried out at an urban national primary school in Selangor, This school has approximately 16 teachers and 155 pupils, including pre-school pupils. Due to teacher shortage and limited pupil enrolment, the school administration combined low and high performing pupils in the same classroom. Each grade has a classroom consisting of 25-35 pupils. The majority of the parents come from B40 families.

3.4   Respondents of the Study

The purposive sampling method was used to select both the teachers and pupils who were the respondents of the study. In total, five teachers and five pupils from the same primary school were selected for the study. The five teachers were selected to be interviewed on the factors that influence pupils' academic performance and to explore the classroom strategies that may have been used to overcome those factors. Three of the teachers had Master's Degrees and two were with Bachelor qualifications. All teachers had more than ten years of experience in teaching high and low performing pupils and were currently teaching pupils in years 5 and 6. In the present study these five teachers were class teachers of the five low performing pupils who were part of this study.

The pupil respondents comprised five low academic performing pupils from the school. These pupils ranged in age from 11 to 12 and came from primary years 5 and 6 in the school. The purposive sampling method was used and the pupils were selected based on their consistently lower than average performance in the last three school-based assessments as well as their regular classroom performance as reported by their teachers who were their class teachers and respondents in the study.

3.5   Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

The research instruments used in this study were a series of interviews with teachers and pupils at the time and date of their choice. Interviews are an efficient method of collecting data for qualitative research and case studies. Furthermore, it is one of the most effective strategies for eliciting spontaneous descriptions of participants' experiences and issues encountered during teaching and learning sessions (Creswell, (2003). The participant's behaviour, feelings, opinions, knowledge, and preferences were observed and recorded in addition to the interview. The interviews were semi-structured to accommodate the material presented and the flow of the participants' experiences. The conceptual structure (Diagram 1) and the research questions served as the basis of framing interview questions for the participants (teachers and pupils). They were tailored to fit the research questions and objectives of the study by matching the students' level of comprehension to understand and accurately answer the questions based on their experience as a student in the school. The following provides an outline of the questioning framework in this study

    i)   Participants: Teachers
The interview questions for the teachers were framed around their perceptions on the following.
    (a) Factors that contribute to the poor academic achievement among low-performing pupils
    (b) Whether parents understood and supported their children/s education progress
    (c) Whether teachers provided
    (d) Learning environment of low-performing students
    (e) Curriculum challenges
    (f) Overlooked factors
    (g) Effective classroom techniques or strategies for low-performing students

ii)   Participants: Pupils

The interview questions for the pupils were focused on Research Questions 1 and 2 which covered the following aspects:

   (a) Internal and external motivation to learn
   (b) Circle of friends
   (c) Mental and physical health
   (d) Pupils' nutritional status
   (e) Family background and involvement
   (f) Gadgets for learning and support provided
   (g) Teacher support and encouragement
   (h) Conducive environment for learning

The interviews were initially scheduled to be conducted face-to-face, but due to the rising number of Covid cases in Malaysia and the participants' safety, the interviews were conducted online. This step also accommodated the participants' preference to participate in this research through an online interview. During the interview, the teachers and pupils were briefed on the purpose and goal to ensure that they were well informed of the research they were participating in. The interviews were videotaped, and the participants were made aware of this. The interviews were conducted one-on-one with the teachers to accommodate their preferred hours, while the pupils were interviewed in groups. They   were divided into two focus groups, and the interview was kept active. Each session of the interviews was scheduled for one hour and thirty minutes. The first group of pupils took more than an hour and thirty minutes to complete the interview based on the allotted time. In the study, the low performing pupils were identified as LPP 1, LPP 2, LPP 3, LPP 4 and LPP 5, while teachers were identified as T1, T2, T3, T4 and T5.

The data collected from interviews were transcribed and analysed to identify the factors contributing to poor academic achievement among low performing pupils. The data were grouped according to the emerging themes and were organized to provide answers to the research questions.

   1. What are the factors that contribute to the poor academic achievement among low-performing pupils?
   2. What are the factors that have been overlooked that contribute to poor academic achievement among low-performing pupils learning?
   3. What are teachers' classroom strategies in managing low-performing pupils?

3.6   Ethical Consideration and Trustworthiness

Before the research, every teacher-respondent was sent an e-form and personally contacted to confirm their consent to participate in the research interview. Parents of the participating pupils were contacted to inform and obtain permission for their child to participate in the study. The purpose of the research study was carefully conveyed to participants to ensure that they were fully aware of the rationale for the study and the purpose of their participation. Participants were allowed to ask questions about the research in which they were participating, and they were given clear feedback to help them gain confidence and comprehension of the research in which they were participating.

Before the interview, participants were informed of the question, and the topic discussed. Participants were thanked for participating in the study during the interview, and they were not judged based on their performance, poor language skills, or race. Participants who struggled with English had the questions translated into Tamil based on their preference and comfort level. The interview with pupils was primarily conducted in Tamil because the low-performing pupils who participated could not explain or comprehend the questions in English.

The participants were politely acknowledged regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, culture, or race; all participants were treated equally and equitably and ensured they felt at ease throughout the interview sessions. However, they were told they could leave the interview if they did not feel comfortable or had concerns about the research.

All of the data provided by participants were used, and none of it was altered to benefit the research. Personal information or school records were not used or disclosed for this study to protect their privacy.

The time and participant's participation were greatly valued, and the interviews were completed within the timeframe that had been negotiated and agreed upon. When an interview session with pupils could not fit into the timeframe planned for them, the pupils were requested to return to complete the interview sessions. Before confirming the extended time, pupils were required to obtain their parents' approval. Participants were not compelled or required to agree to any statements made by the interviewer during this discussion. The participants were allowed to speak uninterrupted. Interviews with teachers and pupils were scheduled following their learning and teaching sessions. The majority of the interviews took place on weekends. The purpose was to minimize disruption to their learning and teaching sessions

4.   Results

4.1   Factors Contributing to Poor Academic Achievement among Low-performing Pupils

The major themes that emerged from the study related to poor academic achievement among low performing pupils were; family involvement, students' motivation, teachers, absenteeism and syllabus.

4.1.1   Family Involvement

All participants in the interviews agreed that family involvement in children's education plays an important role. Broken homes, such as divorced parents, fathers in prison, drug addicts, and remarried parents, contribute to children's poor achievement. Children from such homes would often be placed in the homes of their relatives. Some of these children would suffer from a lack of care, a comfortable place to sleep or study, supervision, or guidance at home. Participants in focus groups also referred to extreme cases where they had knowledge of where children faced an extent of mental and physical abuse including food deprivation. All this, compounded with an utter lack of parental involvement, were cited as being chief contributors towards inactivity in learning or stunted growth in educational development. Teachers 1, 2, 3, and 4 reported that more than half of low-performing pupils lack educational supervision from their families.

According to Teacher 1, the pupils cannot ask their relatives for basic requirements such as books and stationery for their studies, and they do not even have a safe place to sleep.

> *There is a pupil at my school; the mother is a single mother who works somewhere far away and leaves her children under the supervision of a relative. Because this child cannot sleep comfortably and on time at the relatives' house, the pupil will be sleeping in my class during lessons.* (T1)

Another factor that was mentioned by the teacher participants was a family's financial situation being critical to meeting a child's educational needs. Based on their own experience, teachers found that the inability of parents to provide a suitable study area, gadgets, or internet connection, has impeded pupils' learning thus contributing to poor academic achievement. This situation resulted in low grades and children were unable to function optimally.

Apart from the physical and emotional family environments, the education level of parents emerged in almost all participants' responses. Teacher 5 stated that parents with a high prevalence of illiteracy would be unable to support their children since they do not have a sufficient degree of literacy to help their low performing children study. This resonated with comments made by the pupils in the study.

> *My parents cannot understand the syllabus so they won't be able to teach me   LPPI*

My father can't speak English or read, he won't teach but ask us to read and explain the sentences. LPP4

4.1.2 Students' Motivation

Another theme that emerged from all sets of interviews was the motivation factor. Motivation was found to play a significant role in pupil learning. When self-discipline and motivation were lacking pupils were not inspired to be committed to learning, necessitating full assistance from teachers and parents.

Low-performing pupils have doubts about their ability, leading to a lack of confidence and focus. This self-doubt was cited as a reason for quitting and for no motivation to try again unless they had support in their lives. According to Teacher 5, from the teachers' interviews, 'When young children do not receive the necessary support for their learning, they turn to something more straightforward and easier to do for a living, such as jobs that do not require an education qualification.

According to Teacher 4, pupils' low self-esteem drove their motivation to learn. These low performing pupils did not want to compete with high-performing pupils or their peers. Some low performing pupils struggle to read, some struggle in school, and some drop out due to low self-esteem. These children struggled greatly in primary school and dropped out before completing secondary school. According to Teacher 4, one of his Year 6 pupils informed him, "I am going to quit in one week after enrolling in remove or Form 1, sir," Teacher 4 went on to say that the pupil had no intention of studying.

Low-performing pupils were also perceived to have been influenced by their social environment. When pupils observe their parents working in conventional plantations, like truck drivers, mechanics, and so on, they realize that they can earn money and work without higher education. Teachers 4 and 5 agreed that social influences play a vital role in a pupil's self-motivation.

For example, when children observe the people around them loaf after work with their friends in restaurants, drinking alcohol and smoking, and living a simple life yet earning. The low performing pupil gets influenced to have a life like this, and they believe that this group of people is leading a perfect life and a lifestyle they desire. Society has a significant impact on a child's life. T4

One of my low performing pupils was mesmerized to witness a drug dealer who was not working hard but earning much money and living a lavish life. For the child, that is the life he wanted. They do not need to work or study hard to achieve something or earn. T5

4.1.3 Teachers

Teachers also emerged as a theme in the study. Teachers also confessed to facing difficulties teaching classes with mixed Levels of Mastery (TP) pupils. They could not afford the extra time needed to focus on low-performing pupils because they had to give equal attention to the high performing pupils. According to Teacher 1 despite her best efforts to educate in a limited amount of time, 'low-performing pupils do not always follow, listen, or cooperate. Teacher 4 echoed this by saying that the hour allotted to us to conduct the classes was insufficient to manage multiple levels of pupils in the same classroom.
Apart from difficulties in providing equal attention teachers also faced challenges in adapting different levels of instruction, completing the syllabus, preparing additional worksheets, and assigning and guiding homework for low and high-performing pupils in the same classroom. A few pupils claimed that they had been sometimes demotivated by the monotonous teaching styles of certain teachers.

I feel happy listening to some of the teachers. However, I feel bored when they teach again and again the same topic, I want to learn something new than the same thing. LPP1
Some teachers' teachings are boring and some will shout too. Class will be noisy and teacher will get stressed and shout. LPP 3

Some teachers preferred traditional teaching methods and stated that they were reluctant to and tried to avoid the integration of Information and Communications Technology, laptops, or other digital learning platforms in their classroom teaching and learning. They also admitted that while digital teaching methods could potentially influence low-performing pupils' learning, they were often ineffective due to time constraints.

4.1.4   Pupils' Absenteeism

Absenteeism emerged as the fourth factor towards students' low performance. Pupils' unwillingness to attend schools pointed towards being 'bored' in class. It was also a reflection of their own immaturity in being able to appreciate the value of education in their lives. Excuses that were made for skipping school ranged from the significant to the trivial.

> *A child in my class missed three days of school because his mother reported he fell off his bike and complained of physical aches. As a result, his mother permitted him to relax at home.* T3

Some of the pupils revealed reasons related to financial constraints, remote living locations and transportation problems for not being able to attend school regularly. Absenteeism is a severe concern among low-performing pupils in the education index. They are falling behind in their classroom learning due to the situation because teachers will be unable to support the specific pupil.

4.1.5   Syllabus

The final factor that was connected to low performing students was the syllabus. Almost each of the pupils in the study admitted that they could not follow the lessons because the contents were 'too difficult' for them. This was confirmed by the teacher participants in the study who admitted that a lack of fundamental and operational skills in reading, writing and mathematics made it very challenging for low performing students to achieve the learning outcomes that had been desired. follow the syllabus. Despite the teacher's efforts at simplifying the lesson and providing minimum adequate syllabi for low-performing pupils, this group of children continued to struggle to absorb the knowledge due to their poor learning and comprehension skills. Teachers 2 and 3 stated that the majority of the low-performing pupils were unable to follow the syllabus since the fundamentals are lacking.

> *Activities and textbooks are the same for low performing and high performing pupils. However, teachers can simplify the lesson offered in the syllabus based on the pupil's capability; nonetheless, due to other factors, low performing pupils' learning and understanding skills are lower.* T2

Teacher 2 also shared her experience interacting with a pupil who finished his elementary education in a Tamil vernacular school and then moved on to a national secondary school.

> *When the main subjects, such as Mathematics, Science, and Sejarah, were taught in Malay, the pupil was confused and frustrated. It was a difficult challenge for the kid because she had acquired everything in Tamil during her primary school years*   T2

This challenge with coping with the syllabus also surfaced in the responses of the pupil participants who found it difficult to make the transition in medium of instruction from Tamil to Bahasa Melayu.

> *I can understand when teacher explains in Tamil.* (LPP1, LPP3, LPP5)

> *I can understand as teacher translate all the lesson in Tamil.*
> (LPP2, LPP3,LPP5)

4.2 Overlooked Factors Contributing to Poor Academic Achievement among Low-performing Pupils

The study found that the following overlooked factors prevailed significantly among the low performing pupils

4.2.1 Lack of communication

Lack of communication and teamwork are important criteria that serve as obstacles to the pupils' progress in education. It can be seen when parents are not interested to discuss their children's progress with the teachers; parents who give their children far too much freedom without proper guidance and communication with their children lead to critical communication breakdown as the guidance, monitoring, and lack of collaboration are absent in a child's life. According to Teacher 5, communication and teamwork are required to guide this low-performing pupil. Most of the time, this is not met.

> *A low-performing pupil has never turned up to school ever since the pandemic. Teachers have called parents to offer worksheets and exercises for the kid to do at home, but parents are too busy and have ignored their responsibilities to collect the worksheet or assist their child with studies. Here, parents are not as concerned as teachers and are less willing to work with us. How will we help this low-performing pupil excel in their studies?* T5

4.2.2 State of Pupils' Health

Pupils' mental and physical health restrict the child from progressing well in education. Vision issues, hearing impairments, Autistic children, children with ADHD, and learning disabilities are some children who might be overlooked with untreated health problems and subsequently perform poorly in their educational development. According to Teacher 4 another issue is that parents deny that their children have such learning disorders.

> *When the teacher approaches and explains the child's progress and condition that require attention and may impact the child's future, the parents disagree and insist that their child will be ÓK' when he enters secondary school.* T4

4.2.3 Technological Literacy

In the current Covid 19 Pandemic transition, online learning prevailed significantly. To progress, a child is required to take the initiative to work independently rather than solely depending on teachers and syllabus. Low-performing pupils are less likely to take the initiative to work independently, which leads to ignorance and inability to understand the lesson. On the other hand, misusing technology is another overlooked contributing factor that leads pupils to fall behind in their learning. According to Teacher 3, pupils are becoming distracted by technology.

> *During online classes, most of my pupils will join Google Meet but will not submit their work. When I call the parents, they are puzzled since their children usually have gadgets, and the parents believe that their children are studying.* T3

4.3 Strategies to Overcome Factors Contributing to Low-performing Pupils' Progress.

In this section, teachers shared their experience, the techniques they used to overcome challenges faced by the low-performing pupils in their school, and some techniques and ideas that will benefit low-performing pupils' academic achievement. The analysis of interview protocols suggested the

following strategies to be taken by parents, teachers and school managers to help the low performing pupils' progress.

4.3.1   Strategies by Parents

Parents should be motivated and always be inspired to support their children's educational achievement and understand that their role is essential in their children's progress. Parental and teachers' encouragement and teamwork promotes children's success. Low-performing pupils need to be consistently recognized for their effort, contribution, or achievements and encouraged to do better by providing a positive support system.

> *There was an occasion where a low-performing Standard 3 pupil was able to restore a malfunctioning washing machine. He worked on the washing machine and fixed it in his spare time*. (T5)

Encouragement is essential for every child, regardless of their performance, to increase their confidence. Rather than labelling them as low-performing pupils and giving up, parents should encourage, brush up on, and pay attention to their children's abilities.

4.3.2   Strategies by Teachers

According to Teacher 2, teachers must pay close attention to and be patient with low-performing pupils. Teachers should be calm, patient and pay closer attention when dealing with and instructing low-performing pupils. Teacher 2 also stated that teachers must be ready to apologize. When dealing with children, there should be no ego or superiority involved. The teacher should constantly be open to suggestions and feedback from pupils to improve the way they educate kids and listen to their requests. Personal ego should not get in the way of effective teaching and learning, and teachers should always be open to feedback to improve their teaching methods. Teachers should be friendly and approachable to ensure that pupils feel comfortable learning and discussing their weaknesses to find practical solutions to difficulties or challenges. Identifying and guiding low-performing pupils according to their ability might be time-consuming, but it will be effective.

The majority of low-performing pupils are unable to adhere to the syllabus. Teacher 4 proposed that teachers identify and distinguish low-performing pupils from high-performing pupils. Following that, low-performing pupils should be guided based on their abilities.

4.3.3   Strategies by School Administrators and Managers

School schedules shouldn't burden the pupils with complex studies as it will not improve their progress, learning approach, or strategies in the long run. Including fun-filled activities, creativity, and innovative or artistic activities could draw a pupil's interest or attention.

Providing a compatible module for the low-performing pupil will enhance their self-esteem and confidence. Rather than relying solely on teachers to prepare compatible modules for low-performing pupils, the government could standardize the modules being provided to low-performing and high-performing pupils accordingly.

Teachers' ideas, techniques of teaching, and thoughts to improve teaching and learning should be encouraged and taken into consideration in improving the teaching and learning progress.

Associations such as Parents Teachers Associations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) should devise strategies to reach out in assisting these groups of pupils and their parents who were unaware of the available assistance and the ways to apply.

The remedial class based on Literacy and numeracy screening (LINUS), should be modelled as a resource centre, instruction should be based on play and learning, and reinforcement should be done with props to assist this group of pupils in understanding effectively.

Information and Communications Technology (ICT) should be promoted in the classroom as low-performing pupils are more likely to engage in learning because of the unique layout and exciting activities available online.

5.   Discussion

The major factors contributing to poor academic performance in this study were closely related to students' motivation, parents and family involvement, the role of teachers and the syllabus itself. In this the study confirmed the findings from previous studies by Jung, Zhou, and Lee (2017) and Lee, Dean, and Kim, (2017). that a well-motivated student may be able to persevere longer in their educational achievement, engage in deeper learning, and perform better in class. High external motivation can boost a student's intrinsic motivation, self-efficacy, self-determination, and general motivation towards education, career goals and grades. According to Maslow's (1987) Hierarchy of Needs, low-performing pupils suffer from unsatisfied needs. When a youngster cannot achieve their fundamental needs, it is difficult for the child to progress in education or life.

This motivation whether intrinsic or extrinsic was also found to be very much linked to the other emerging factors and in particular parental and family involvement. In this, the present study also concurs with previous studies by Cashman, et.al. (2021) on the role of parental involvement on student performance. Parents' engagement affects a child's communication, confidence, and readiness for school. Parents' attention, advice, pleasant experiences, and bonding time with children are vital for their growth, enhancing their confidence to be productive in school, and helps to prevent absenteeism and poor academic performance. Constant interaction by parents, teachers, and peers will increase pupils' confidence to ask questions, present an idea, or answer a question confidently, which could create smooth learning progression and bridge learning gaps. This affirms Vygotsky's (1962) sociocultural theory which states that social interaction is essential to a child's cognitive development. Through social interaction, the child could develop specific learning, memory, attention, and problem-solving abilities to be more capable and advanced.

The role of teachers was also particularly highlighted from the findings where teacher professionalism and general attitude towards students both low and high performing played a role in their motivation, learning and subsequently their academic performance. This again corresponds with Harris and Huffman's (2018) conclusion on the correlation between teacher quality and pupil achievement.

The need to match the syllabus to the academic competence level of the pupil also emerged from the findings and this has also raised the question of how teachers will be able to balance between fulfilling the requirements of a curriculum which has been prescribed by the Ministry of Education and deciding on what their learners need to progress.

Other factors which are sometimes overlooked, and which emerged in the study included those related to school environment, communication, pupil health, technological literacy and the need for collaborative strategies.

The need for a conducive learning environment was also one of the factors that emerged, and this supports Chong (2020) who emphasised the need for a supportive learning environment. Teamwork, encouragement, technology integration, and behavior control may turn any classroom into an active learning environment, resulting in more active learners.
Well-equipped schools can improve the quality of teaching and learning. The school facilities influence the success of pupils, and the effectiveness of a teacher's lessons. (Wilson & Narasuman, 2020). It impacts the overall school experience of pupils and teachers and their health, behavior, and engagement, making it easier to deliver better education (Andrews, 2019).

The study also concurred with previous studies on the need to consider both students' psychological and physical conditions in order to address inattentiveness and the importance of motivation and psychosocial counselling. (Muniruzzaman & Siddiky, 2021).

In efforts towards improving academic performance especially of low performing students it became very clear also that there needs to be collaboration among the major stake--holders including parents, school administration and teachers as well as policy makers. Furthermore, awareness of involvement, support, the importance of education, collaboration, engagement, and teamwork should

be instilled in all individuals to make an impact and ensure a smooth learning experience for low-performing pupils.

6. Implications of the Study

Among the factors that were found to contribute to low academic performance were. parental involvement, motivation, learning facilities, interaction, equality, awareness, and teaching techniques Some of these factors were more readily obvious and others like school facilities, technological literacy and student health were sometimes overlooked. As a result, it is critical to address the factors that contribute to low academic progress in low-performing pupils and assist them in developing and growing in their educational attainments.

The implications to policy makers and in particular curriculum developers is to be always mindful of the levels of competencies of pupils and to shape the syllabus with this differentiation in mind so that every pupil will have an equal opportunity to progress from the current level he or she is at to the next. For school administrators and teachers, it is of utmost importance to not only identify these low performing students but to also hone in on the issues that lead to their poor performance on a more individual basis. Clear learning goals should be created for each pupil, which should be explained, and pupils should be encouraged to achieve them. Learning rewards should be given to pupils when they improve, succeed, or accomplish their task. This strategy will motivate them towards higher achievements. Pupils should be encouraged and provided with frequent feedback.

The role of parents is very important in the progress of their child's education and there needs to be a greater awareness among parents of this particularly parents of low performing pupils. As motivation is another key factor, this needs to come from both parents and teachers who are the nearest points of contact in the pupils' education progress.

Parents must be aware of their role in their child's education progress, children need constant motivation especially in the face of obstacles and challenges, teachers need to teach according to the needs of their pupils with improvisation. The study also suggests a need for more programmes to be conducted related to funding and motivational needs of low-performing pupils.

Pupils should be given equal opportunities regardless of their capability and be rewarded for their achievements. Every youngster is a national treasure who deserves equal educational chances and financial help. To achieve the aspirations of the country's educational objectives and generate quality citizens, factors contributing to poor academic achievement among low-performing students must be addressed. Without good direction and assistance, many pupils lose their way amidst the rigors of education and life.

7. Limitations of the Study

The response and cooperation of research participants are one of the study's limitations. Participants may not have discussed specific experiences completely or they may have wished to ensure that their experiences were reflected in a socially acceptable manner. Second, due to Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) restrictions and the end of the school year, teachers were extremely busy, and scheduling an interview was difficult. Third, the use of an online platform was difficult. The majority of the teachers and pupils lived on the outskirts of town, with unreliable internet connections. Some participants could not turn on the camera and frequently lost connection, necessitating re-entry into the interview. This situation detracted from the interview conversation and discussion. Fourth, the study's size is five teachers and five pupils from the same school. If the interview involves multiple schools, there may be a trend in the factors to be compared, as well as for the factors that were overlooked. Research interviews with one school are insufficient to generalize the factors influencing poor academic achievement in low-performing pupils at other schools.

8. Conclusion

This research not only delved into the factors that contribute to poor academic achievement among low performing pupils but also highlighted the factors that are often overlooked. Apart from that strategies or ways to overcome these deficiencies were also proposed in the study. Some of the factors like family involvement and motivation while corresponding with results from previous studies

were dealt with in in-depth and personal responses due to the qualitative case study approach that was employed. In general, the study found that our schools in Malaysia are not immune to this contributing factor to low performing pupils. Due to various reasons, some of which are disregarded, pupils are confronted with many difficulties that are neither recognized nor resolved by anyone. The findings of this study indicated that low-performing pupils experience a variety of obstacles in their educational endeavours and the collaborative efforts from the different stakeholders are needed to address these issues.

9.   Recommendations for Further Research

Future research can be conducted in more than one school to identify, correlate, and uncover the factors and overlooked factors that contribute to poor academic achievement among low-performing pupils and techniques and ideas for overcoming the challenges. Choosing and researching respondents from rural, outskirts of town, and urban areas will provide a broader understanding and perception of the barrier to facilitating these low-performing pupils' educational achievement.

Furthermore, diverse respondents will provide extensive exposure to the situation as pupils, and other parties experience it. In this research, teachers and pupils were interviewed, but for future research, researchers should consider approaching parents, principals, government officials, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and other individuals involved in low-performing pupils' education achievement.

Another study that could be conducted is to delve deeper into motivation, self-esteem and pupil anxiety during learning that has adverse effects on their academic performances.

10.   Co-Author Contribution

The authors affirmed that there is no conflict of interest in this article. Author 1 carried out the fieldwork, prepared the literature review, wrote the research methodology and overlooked the writeup of the whole article. Authors 2 and 3 carried out the analysis, interpreted the findings and presented the recommendations.

11.   Acknowledgement

12.   References

Abu Hassan, M. A., Rabbani, M. F., Shukor, M. E., & Abdul Majid, M. M. (2018). Sikap Guru Terhadap Perubahan dalam Sekolah di Malaysia. *Management Research Journal, 7,* 188 - 196.

Andrews, Archieval. (2019, October 28). *The Importance of School Facilities |* Fresco News. Fresco News; www.fresconews.com. https://www.fresconews.com/how-school-facilities-improve-a-childs-school-experience/

Boey C.C, Omar A, & Arul Philips J (2003). Correlation among academic performances, recurrent abdominal pain and other factors in Year 6 urban primary-school children In Malaysia. *J Pediatric Children Health 2003*;352-7

Cashman, L., Sabates, R., & Alcott, B. (2021). Parental involvement in low-achieving children's learning: The role of household wealth in rural India. *International Journal   of Educational Research*, *105*, 101701. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2020.101701

Chong Hui, L. (2020). *Conducive environment a must for learning. The Star*, (n.d) https://www.thestar.com.my/news/education/2020/07/26/conducive-environmenta-must-for-learning

Creswell, W.J (2003). Research design: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method approaches. (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Daud, N. (2021, October 29). Budget 2022: Ministry of Education Gets Highest Allocation of

RM52.6 Billion, PTPTN Borrowers Get Discount Until April 2022 | *Malaysia World News*. malaysiaworldnews.com. https://www.malaysiaworldnews.com/budget-2022-ministry-of-education-gets-highest-allocation-of-rm52-6-billion-ptptn-borrowers-get-discount-until-april-2022/

Delfino, A. P. (2019). Student Engagement and Academic Performance of Students of Partido State University. *Asian Journal of University Education*, *15(3),* 42–55. https://doi.org/10.24191/ajue.v15i3.05

Harris, A., & Jones, M. (2017). Leading educational change and improvement at scale: some inconvenient truths about system performance. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 1-10

Harris, A., Jones, M., & Huffman, J. B. (2018). *Teachers leading educational reform: The power of professional learning communities.* London, UK: Routledge.

Jung, K. R., Zhou, A. Q., & Lee, R. M. (2017). *Self-efficacy, self-discipline and academic performance: Testing a context-specific mediation model. Learning and Individual Differences*, 33–39. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lindif.2017.10.004.

Kendal, L. (2018 Feb 27). *Poorest children in Malaysia capital suffer educational barriers – UNICEF report. Study International,* https://www.studyinternational.com/news/poorest-childrenmalaysias-capital-suffer-educational-barriers-unicef-report/

Lee, M., Dean, J. and Kim, Y. (2017), "Academic Achievement of Latino Immigrant Adolescents: The Effects of Negative School Social Relationships, School Safety, and Educational Expectation", The Power of Resistance. *Advances in Education in Diverse Communities, Vol. 12),* Emerald Publishing Limited, pp. 265-289.

Maslow, A.H. (1987). *Motivation and Personality (3rd ed.).* Delhi, India: Pearson Education

M Demir Güdül, Can G, Ceyhan AA. (2019) *University Students' Academic Motivation Profiles: Relationships with Academic Procrastination and Life Satisfaction,* https://openaccess.iku.edu.tr/handle/11413/2341

Ministry of Education Malaysia. (2013). *Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025.* 2013.Putrajaya: Ministry of Education Malaysia.

Muniruzzaman, Md., & Siddiky, Md. R. (2021). Association between Students' Inattentiveness to Study and their Psychological Conditions during the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Asian Journal of University Education*, *17*(2), 27. https://doi.org/10.24191/ajue.v17i2.11011

OECD (2016), "Engagement, Motivation and Self-Confidence among Low-Performing Students", in *Low Performing Students: Why They Fall Behind and How to Help Them Succeed*, OECD Publishing, Paris. https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264250246-6-en

Oswald, D.P., Zaidi, H.B., Cheatham, D.S., & Brody, K.G.D. (2018). Correlates of parent involvement in student's learning: Examination of a national data set. *Journal of Child and Family Studies, 27,* 316-323.

Pau, S., & Yasin, M. (2021). Pengetahuan dan sikap guru aliran perdana terhadap program pendidikan inklusif di daerah Sibu. *Jurnal Dunia Pendidikan, 3(1),* 515-529.

Rajendram, R. (2020, October 21). *Poor students skipping school. The Star.* (n.d) Retrieved March 29, 2022, from https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2020/10/21/poor- students-skippingschool

Tai, M. K., & Omar, A. K. (2017). Measuring teacher attitudes toward change: An empirical validation. *International Journal of Management in Education*, *11(4),* 437-469. doi: 10.1504/IJMIE.2017.10005987

Tai, M. K., Omar, A. K., Khalip, M., Ghouri, A. M., & Khan Naveed, R. (2020b). Leading sustainable schools in the Era of Education 4.0: Identifying school leadership competencies in Malaysian secondary schools. *International Journal of Management in Education. 14(6),* 580–610. doi: 10.1504/IJMIE.2020.110690

Vigneswararao, H. (2019 Nov 12). *I Can't Afford School: Poverty's Role in Education Inequity. Teach For Malaysia*, https://teachformalaysia.org/stories/i-cant-afford-school/

Vygotsky,L.S. (1962). *Thought and Language*. Cambridge MA:MIT Press

Walberg, H. J. (1981). A psychological theory of educational productivity. In F. H. Farley & N
. Gordon (Eds.), *Psychology and Education 4* (pp. 81-108)

Walberg,H.J., Fraser, B.J., & Welch, H.J. (1986). A test of a model of educational productivity among senior high students. *Journal of Educational Research, 79*, 133-139

Wilson, D. M., & A/l Narasuman, S. (2020). Investigating Teachers' Implementation and Strategies on Higher Order Thinking Skills in School Based Assessment Instruments. *Asian Journal of University Education*, *16(1),* 70. https://doi.org/10.24191/ajue.v16i1.8991

Yin, R. K. (2017). *Case Study Research: Design and Methods (6th ed.).* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc.

Yulianti, K., Denessen, E., & Droop, M. (2018). The effects of parental involvement on children's education: A study in elementary school in Indonesia. *International Journal about Parents in Education,10(1),* 14-32.