

Students in IP schools set sights higher



PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS MATTER

It is not so much the type of school that matters. Parents should not judge their children's abilities based on the secondary schools they are in. If they can do this, it will help the confidence of children in non-elite secondary schools.



MS ONG XIANG LING, a Singapore Children's Society research officer, on the study which pointed to class differences between schools to some extent.

They are more confident of going to university than their peers in other schools, study shows

Amelia Teng

Secondary school students in Integrated Programme (IP) schools are 2½ times more confident of attaining at least a university degree, compared to their peers in other schools, according to a new study.

It also found that parents' expectations played a more important role in children's confidence in pursuing higher education, compared to other factors such as type of school.

The study, which also pointed to some extent of class differences between schools, was commissioned and conducted by the Singapore Children's Society (SCS) and completed in April. The society offers a range of services for children, youth and families. It also does research on related social trends.

Its principal investigator is Ms Ong Xiang Ling, an SCS research officer, and its research adviser is Dr Cheung Hoi Shan, a post-doctoral fellow at the National University of Singapore (NUS).

Their research findings were presented last Friday at a global conference hosted by NUS' Centre for Family and Population Research.

Ms Ong said the study's key aim

was to find out if students from different schools have varying educational aspirations, and how differently they perceived their academic abilities. She added that there has not been much research or data on social stratification in local schools.

From September to December last year, 601 students aged between nine and 17 were surveyed, along with their parents.

The students came from a spread of housing estates and schools across Singapore. They were divided into three school categories.

Type 1 comprised IP schools, which allow students to skip the O levels, and primary schools which offered the Gifted Education Programme. Primary schools affiliated to IP schools were also in this group.

Type 2 were government-aided schools and autonomous schools which did not offer the IP, and Type 3 were government schools.

The study involved 31, 48 and 111 schools from the three categories respectively. The researchers randomly selected housing estates nearest schools, after identifying geographical areas with the highest make-up of Primary 4 to Secondary 4 schoolchildren based on national census statistics.

Ms Ong said the sample size is representative of Singapore's population in terms of gender, ethnic composition and housing type. To ensure a fair representation, not more than 15 students were picked from a single school.

Door-to-door surveys were conducted by interviewers from a local research company. Parents and children were interviewed separately.

The interviews covered topics such as parents' and children's aspirations, and how confident they were of their academic abilities. They were also asked to indicate socio-economic status (SES) information such as if they lived in private housing, if any parent is a university graduate and if their monthly household income exceeded \$10,000.

Ms Ong said the study threw up a few significant findings. First, children from Type 1 schools were more likely to have high educational aspirations. For instance, about 80 per cent of Type 1 secondary school students were highly confident that they could get at least a university degree, compared to 54 per cent and 42 per cent for Type 2 and 3 students respectively.

There was no difference in confidence levels for primary school pupils, perhaps because parents feel primary school is less important than secondary school, said Ms Ong. "Confidence levels get a boost when students are in Type 1 second-

ary schools. Parents tend to believe that if the child is in a good secondary school, he or she will be more likely to achieve good results at the national exams, which are high-stakes exams that determine the child's tertiary pathways."

In secondary school, students' school type and SES influenced their aspirations but parents' expectations played a more important role, according to the study.

About 88 per cent of parents whose children attend Type 1 secondary schools were highly confident of their children's ability to attain a degree, compared to 70 per cent and 52 per cent for Type 2 and Type 3 respectively.

Similarly, among the multiple factors, only parents' expectations made a difference in primary school pupils' confidence.

Ms Ong said: "It is not so much the type of school that matters. Parents should not judge their children's abilities based on the secondary schools they are in. If they can do this, it will help the confidence of children in non-elite secondary schools."

Ms Ong and Dr Cheung are now working on a research monograph, or a compilation of their study's results, to be made public this year.

More findings from the study will be released next month.

ateng@sph.com.sg

Differences between school types

	Primary school pupils			Secondary school students		
	Type 1	Type 2	Type 3	Type 1	Type 2	Type 3
Private housing	39%	25%	3%	30.7%	16%	2%
At least one parent who completed university	74%	47%	33%	53.5%	24%	17%
Monthly household income over \$10,000	48%	29%	12%	40.7%	25%	7%

Type 1: Integrated Programme (IP) schools, their affiliated primary schools, and primary schools which offered the Gifted Education Programme

Type 2: Government-aided schools and autonomous schools which did not offer the IP

Type 3: Government schools

NOTE: The figures refer to the percentage of respondents polled who live in private homes, have at least one parent who is a university graduate and whose monthly household income is more than \$10,000.

Source: SINGAPORE CHILDREN'S SOCIETY
STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS

Study: Kids from affluent families more likely in IP, GEP schools

Children from higher socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to attend Integrated Programme (IP) secondary schools and their affiliated primary schools, as well as those that offer the Gifted Education Programme (GEP).

This was a key finding of a recent study that examined class stratification in schools and if students from different schools had different levels of educational aspirations.

The study was done by Ms Ong Xiang Ling, its principal investigator who is a Singapore Children's Society research officer, and Dr Cheung Hoi Shan, a post-doctoral fellow at the National University of Singapore.

Their work pointed to a disproportionate number of students from affluent backgrounds in IP and GEP schools.

In the study, schools were divided into three groups and about 200 students from each group were polled. Type 1 were IP schools, their affiliated primary schools, as well as primary schools which offered the GEP. Type 2 were government-aided schools and autonomous schools which did not offer the IP, and Type 3 were government schools.

Data showed that nearly 41 per cent of Type 1 secondary school students came from families with a monthly household income that exceeded \$10,000, compared to 7 per cent in Type 3 schools. About 31 per cent of Type 1 students lived in private homes, compared to 2 per cent in Type 3. About 54 per cent of Type 1 students had at least one parent with university education, compared to 17 per cent in Type 3.

The fact that there is a significant disparity in secondary schools, where entry is supposed to be by merit, points to a possible perpetuation of class differences in schools, said the researchers. Dr Cheung said: "The observation from many news reports... does point to some

form of social stratification in our schools; so in elite schools you tend to have families represented by higher socio-economic status (SES) and in other neighbourhood schools you tend to have the reverse."

She added: "We see SES differences also in secondary schools, where entry is supposed to be determined in large part by the children's results in the PSLE. Entry is not about distance or alumni associations, yet we also see marked SES differences in elite secondary schools. So it may point to a perpetuation – if you started off with high SES, chances are because you have more resources, you are better prepared for PSLE, so you are more likely to get into good secondary schools."

Said Ms Ong: "Higher SES children are more likely to be in Type 1 schools, and being in Type 1 schools makes them more likely to have high confidence in attaining at least a university degree. Then it would mean that there could be a perpetuation of class differences, because research has shown that if you have high confidence of attaining a university degree, you are more likely to actually get a university degree."

Amelia Teng