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Factors influencing students' academic aspirations in higher institution: a conceptual analysis

Nassudin Othman[a], Fauziah Nordin[a], Norzanah Mat Nor[b]*, Zaiton Endot[c], Azida Azmi[d], Ismarani Ismail[e], Azizah Yaakob[f]

abcdef Faculty of Business management, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Shah Alam, 404050, Malaysia

Abstract

Higher education is critical success of young adults. Higher education can provide a gateway for social mobility and play a critical role in countering social stratification in Malaysia, particularly for the Bumiputera students in Malaysia society. However, change hurts. The transition from school to university is a change that every school students have to face in their quest for higher education. The current scenario giving some signals that there is a challenging life transition in the development of young adults, and many students are inadequately prepared for the psychological, emotional, and academic realities of higher education. These new university students are confronted with the adaptational challenges of living apart from family and friends, adjusting to the academic regimen, assuming responsibility for the tasks of daily living, and developing a new array of social relationships with peers and faculty. Futhermore, not many research have been conducted on this issue except that focused had been made to the secondary and/or high school students only. Therefore, this paper takes the challenge of filling these gaps by analysing some crucial conceptual undertanding what factors exactly influence the student's life at the higher institution.

* Corresponding author
E-mail address: norzanah@salam.uitm.edu.my

1. Introduction

Findings in the literature support the contention that the academic factors influencing students' academic aspirations are compounded by family, school and personal factors including social support, academic self-concept and perceptions of the university environment. Research that has been conducted in this area has limited implications for understanding academic aspiration of college students for two main reasons. First, much of the research that has been done on aspirations examines high school, rather than college (or university), students' post-high school aspiration (Alon and Tienda 2007; Tienda and Ko 1998; Mayers et al 2004). Second, the research that does look at college (university) students' aspirations has done much to further the conversation on the importance of aspirations, but is limited by: 1) data that increasingly outdated; 2) a focus on developed countries like USA, Canada, and Great Britain; 3) an emphasis on students' post-college, rather than college (university). This present study attempts to address these limitations in past research by using recent data to identify different factors that influence the bumiputera students of a local university in Malaysia in terms of their academic aspirations. In addition, by examining variations in the academic aspirations of these university students, namely, by gender, family background, year in university, age, social class, and other selected demographic variables, this study seeks to understand the influence of these demographic variables and perceived social support, academic self-concept, academic motivation, and perceived university environment on the academic aspiration of bumiputera students. The findings of this study can then be used to aid management to better understand the students and better equip them with the necessary assistance to make their transition from school to university a more successful endeavor.

2. Background of the Study

Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) is described as Malaysia's premier local institution of higher learning that has experienced phenomenal growth since its inception in 1956. Today, the university has expanded nationwide with 15 branch campuses, three satellite campuses, nine city campuses, 21 affiliated colleges and a smart campus for the future (www.uitm.edu.my). Based on the statistics from the Pusat Perancangan Strategik, UiTM (2009), the total workforce of UiTM is15,099 (academic: 7,270; administrative staff: 7829), and with the vast network throughout Malaysia and staff population of 15,099, the university offers more than 300 academic programmes in a conducive and vibrant environment. In addition, it is also home to 139,634 students of which 117,983 are the full-time students while 12.946 are the part-time students (Pusat Perancangan Strategik, 2009). The University is committed to help Bumiputera students achieve at the highest scholarly levels and to prepare them for careers in public and professional practice in various fields. Its formation is based on a vision of outstanding scholarship and academic excellence that is capable of providing leadership in various arenas. Although still a fledgling compared to its local counterparts, UiTM has earned a reputation as being one of Malaysia's innovative and entrepreneurial universities, as it has formed linkages with numerous and diverse industrial sectors. Hence, its relationships with the industries have enriched its research and innovation as well as its entrepreneurial culture (www.uitm.edu.my).

The university's vision is to establish UiTM as a premier university of outstanding scholarship and academic excellence capable of providing leadership to Bumiputeras's dynamic involvement in all professional fields of world-class standards in order to produce globally competitive graduates of sound ethical standing. Based on this vision, UiTM is committed to enhance the knowledge and expertise of Bumiputeras in all fields of study through professional programmes, research work and community service based on moral values and professional ethics. UiTM believes that every individual has the ability to attain excellence through the transfer of knowledge and assimilation of moral values so as to become professional graduates capable of developing knowledge, self, society and nation (www.uitm.edu.my). In order to fulfill these vision, mission, and objectives, the university

needs to look seriously at the school-to-university transition issue. Research has identified college as a time of difficult adjustment (Lu, 1994; DeBerard, Spielmans, & Julka, 2004; Tognoli, 2003) and stress (Chieng, Hunter, & Yeh, 2004; Kuo, Hagie & Miller, 2004; Zea, Jarama & Bianchi, 1995; Staats, Armstrong- Stassen, & Partilo, 1995). Despite the adjustment and stress of college, many students succeed in accomplishing their academic goals and may have aspirations for professional or graduate degrees. It is of interest to identify which students are able to succeed despite the many stressors that first-year college students face. With this information it may be possible to determine student needs and strengths to inform more beneficial student services and programs that would be more beneficial for students and enable them to cope successfully with the transition stage and focus on their academic achievement. This will consequently lead to the achievement of the university's vision, mission, and objectives.

3. Literature Review

Review of the literature on research in higher education issues indicates that the transition to college as a complex period that includes stress (DeBerard, Spielmans, & Julka, 2004; Tognoli) and greater opportunities for exercising independence. In addition, this transition period may also provide students with an opportunity for introspection that result in the redefinition of one's identity (Brooks & BuBois, 1995). Brooks and DuBois (1995) investigated predictors of academic and psychological adjustment of first-year students and found that the factors contributing to overall college adjustment included: standardized test scores, problem-solving skills and emotional stability strong predictors, distance from home, daily stress and social support. Tognoli (2003) findings support the idea that students who have a greater distance between their college campus and their parental home face more difficulty with the transition to college because they are less able to access their social networks and familiar environments. Findings in the literature found that college students' perceptions and personality characteristics influence the relationship between the transition to college and academic factors. Some of these factors include self-efficacy (Coffman & Gilligan, 2002) and self-concept (Cokley, Komarraju, King, Cunningham & Muhammad, 2003; Boulter, 2002; Hamachek, 1995). Skills such as coping strategies and responses to stress (Gloria, Castellanos &Orozco, 2005; Shields, 2001; Struthers, 1995) have also been investigated and found to influence the college transition. A student's perceptions of the campus environment (Belcheir, 2003; Gloria & Ho, 2003; Reid & Radhakrishnan, 2003; Davis, 1994; Belcheir, 2003) and opportunities for mentorship (Plecha, 2002; Santos & Reigadas, 2000) have also been found to influence a student's college transition. In general, researchers in this area have acknowledged social support and a student's social network as contributing greatly to a student's academic endeavors (for e.g., Skahill, 2002; Brooks & DuBois, 1995; Zea, Jarama, & Bianchi, 1995). Coffman and Gilligan (2002) investigated social support, stress and self-efficacy to identify the relationship between these factors among first-year college students. Findings suggested that students who stated that they had low levels of perceived stress, high social support and high self-efficacy levels were more likely to have higher scores on a life satisfaction measure. Skahill (2002) investigated the influence that social support networks had on residential freshman students' persistence behaviors. Results of this study suggested that, compared to commuter freshman students, freshman students living in student housing facilities were more likely to persist despite experiencing sudden changes in the amount and/or significance of social relationships (Skahill, 2002).

According to Gloria, Hird & Navarro (2001), students' perceptions of the university environment, which includes cultural congruity or how well a student perceives their culture to be welcomed, represented and supported by the university/college, are important in a student's adjustment to university life. In support of this, Belcheir (2003) state that the emphasis that the campus environment places on facets of college society, including academic goals, studying, participating in non-academic activities, creating social networks, contact with students who are culturally or ethnically diverse, and attendance of university-sponsored events, has been shown to greatly influence students', especially ethnic minority students' adjustment to college. Based on the

discussion above, it is clear that previous and current research support the contention that the academic factors influencing students' academic aspirations are compounded by family, school and personal factors including social support, academic self-concept and perceptions of the university environment. To the best of the researchers' knowledge, there is hardly any published study found in Malaysia. Therefore, this study will attempt to assess the degree to which perceived social support, academic self-concept and perceptions of the university environment influence students' academic aspirations.

3.1 Perceptions of Social Support

Vaux (1988) described social support as a complex process that involves a person interacting with the social ecological context. He further described social support as involving social resources, social support appraisals and behaviour. According to Vaux (1988), maintaining a support network involves the exchanges of relationships development and maintenance. The nature of the interaction often depends on factors such as a person's coping abilities, stressors they may face, or even the situations they may be faced with. Vaux (1988) explained that in situations of stress a social network may self-activate, meaning that the people that comprise a person's social network may become aware of this difficulty and act in response to it even before the person elicits assistance. In similar vein, Skahill (2002), states that when college students enter college they often experience changes in their social network because of both the distance from their home environment as well as the new college environment. This change may lead to the loss of some friendships that were created before college and the addition of some friendships from college. Hence, it can be deduced that the transition to college or university is a time of vulnerability for a person's social network because many connections do not continue to be maintained and this may influence a student's attitude and behaviour at the new environment.

Research in the area of social support also presents the concept of perceived versus actual support received (Cohen & Haberman, 1983 as cited in Coffman & Gilligan, 2002). This research has informed that even when an act was not meant to be supportive, the illusion of support could be enough for someone to feel the effect of support. It also follows that if a person has the misconception that they can count on a member of their social network, as they have perceived this support in the past, and then realize that this perception has been incorrect, the stress the individual experiences could be compounded. There are also different ways that social support can manifest. Vaux (1988) stated that social support can be seen in the response a person in your social network has for you in times of crises or when your time spent together is not due to crisis or stressors. Vaux (1988) elaborated that often research has investigated social support in terms of the kinds of activities that respondents identify as supportive, as well as the purpose or function of social support. He concluded that whereas social support can be manifested in different ways and there may be differences between a person's perceived and actual social support, social support serves a role in people's lives. Specifically, social support methods are vital in serving to meet a person's basic needs for socialization, highlighting someone's goals as well as providing motivation for these goals, and coping with difficulty and stress. This suggests that whereas the specific characteristics of a person's social support system may vary, a person will often look to their social support network to meet a variety of needs.

Coffman and Gilligan (2002) studied 94 first-year college students, focusing on the relationship between life satisfaction and social support. Their findings indicate that students with higher levels of social support and lower levels of reported stress were also more likely to rate higher levels of life satisfaction. Also, those students with higher levels of stress were more likely to report that they were less satisfied with life in general. Coffman and Gilligan (2002) suggested that higher education administrators, faculty, parents, and even students themselves should focus on ways to encourage the formation of social support networks that students can draw upon when they enter college and pursue their academic goals. Students often report that friends are a source of support

during difficult times. Skahill (2002) investigated 83 first-year college students' social support network to investigate the role that it plays in a student's persistence. Results showed that students who reported more friendships in school were also more likely to state that they felt they were successful in their academic setting. These students were more likely to state success in learning, grades, and completing tasks. Skahill (2002) also compared commuting students with residential students and found that commuter students had an easier time dropping out of school, if that was their decision, because they had fewer ties to the campus and a social network already established at home.

   Residential students, those in on-campus housing, who did choose to drop out of college faced more difficulty in transitioning out of college as they would have to move out of the housing complex and travel to their parental home. Skahill (2002) stated that for this reason, residential students may have more to lose in dropping out and may be more invested in developing stronger social support networks as well as struggle harder to cope with stress and problems and stay in college. This study also found that whereas the size of most students' social support networks did not change, there were changes in the members that constituted the network. Also, Skahill (2002) noted that students were more likely to be concerned with creating a social support network that meets their needs rather than just focusing on having a dense social support network. Larose and Boivin (1998) investigated the attachment to parents and social support. They results show that students who left their families to attend college were more likely to have increased levels of perceived support from family (parents) but have higher levels of loneliness and social anxiety. This may indicate that as a student transitions to college or university, he/she may feels a greater desire for the security that comes from parents and thus gain a greater appreciation for their support. In addition, the study found that students' perceptions of security in parental relationships were predictive of other positive changes in a student's expectations of support as he/she transitions to college or university. It appears that a secure parental attachment and support from family allows students to better judge other sources of support.

   The influence of faculty and other university officials has been investigated with relation to the academic experiences of students (for e.g., Lamport, 1993; Pascarella, Terenzini & Hibel, 1978). Faculty contribute to the academic experiences of university students and have the potential to serve as role models and sources of support. Researchers have found that the knowledge that professors provide to students is not limited to course instruction because it may include providing general knowledge about the college experience and the future goals of students by serving as role models. The literature has investigated the formal and informal interaction between faculty and students (Lamport, 1993; Pascarella, Terenzini & Hibel, 1978). In his review of literature on student-faculty informal interaction, Lamport (1993) stated that faculty serve as agents of socialization that can influence a student's academic achievement, satisfaction with the college experience, as well as their career and academic aspirations. Lamport (1993) cited Pascarella, Terenzini and Hibel's (1978) study of informal student-faculty interaction which found that the informal interaction with faculty could be more influential to students than the influence of peers or the overall college experience. This suggests that faculty have the power to greatly influence a student's decisions to persist in college and, as Lamport (1993) stated, students who report greater student-faculty interaction are more likely to persist. Lamport (1993) also stated that whereas the literature has confirmed the importance of peer interaction to a student's overall satisfaction with college, the interaction that students have with faculty is also important to the overall satisfaction with the college experience. Research on social support has focused on general support that a person receives and has not investigated support that is specific to academic goals and aspirations. That is, whereas someone may feel supported as a person in the many roles that he/she serves (i.e. daughter, sister, friend etc.) he/she may not feel supported in their career or academic ambitions or the means they must take to reach these aspirations. However, there is hardly any existing measures that investigate social support for specific goals such as academic in Malaysia. As a result, the purpose of this study will be to investigate the relationship between social support and academic aspirations of students in a university in Malaysia.

3.2 Academic Self-Concept

A review of the literature indicates that research in the area of academic motivation has compared academic self-concept and academic self-efficacy and has led to debates on the differences and similarities of these constructs. Bong and Clark (1999) and Bong and Skaalvik (2003) have attempted to define both terms. Bong and Clark (1999) defined self-efficacy as an individual's belief in his or her ability to reach a goal whereas self-concept includes both cognitions about you and feelings related to these cognitions. The authors also differentiated the two constructs by stating that self-concept relies on comparison of one's ranking compared to others in a specific reference group and is influenced by someone's performance in other areas whereas self-efficacy is based mostly on cognitive perceptions of an individual's ability (Bong & Clark, 1999). The authors concluded, based on their review of the literature, that self-efficacy is the best predictor of educational attainment. The authors stated that academic self-concept is a general perception of someone's self-worth and ability, and that self-efficacy is more useful to predict performance on specific academic tasks. In their review on the issue of self-efficacy and self-concept, Bong and Skaalvik (2003) stated that a student with a strong self-efficacy and positive self-concept will be more likely to set difficult but possible goals, continue to work for more time on challenging activities, enjoy academic activities more than those with a weak self-efficacy and negative self-concept. Bong and Skaalvik (2003) suggest that academic self-efficacy beliefs are necessary to develop an academic self-concept as self-concept includes conceptions of ability and worth that are influenced by general impressions and comparisons.

Hamachek (1995) reported that a relationship exists between high self esteem and positive self-concept as well as between high self-esteem and high academic achievement. Research also supports high academic achievement leading to higher self-esteem and higher self-esteem positively affecting self-concept (Michie, Glachan, & Bray, 2001). Students with a positive academic self-concept are more likely to feel that they can handle more difficult academic challenges which increase the likelihood that they will take more difficult classes and have higher academic aspirations including college and/or an advanced degree (Hamachek, 1995). Furthermore, realistic and reachable goals are more often set by high academic self-concept students which most likely result in success (Hamachek, 1995). This success then fuels more realistic goals which most likely will continue the cycle of success. However, students identified as having low self-concept are more likely to set goals that are harder or impossible to reach which can lead to difficulty in reaching success (Hamachek, 1995).

Based on the findings in the literature, it can be argued that once a low self-concept student becomes tired of being unsuccessful he or she may choose to leave the academic environment. According to Eckstrom, Goertz, Pollack and Rock (1987; as cited in Hamachek, 1995), who analyzed data in a study of national drop-out behaviors one third of those included in the study claimed their decision to drop-out of school was due to the many negative experiences whereas another group of students (1/3) stated their reason for dropping out was poor grades. Whereas it is not in the scope of this study, an interesting area to also investigate and include in this discussion of academic self-concept is how teacher or professor's perceptions of students' academic ability influence student's academic self-concept. As mentorship and academic role-models have already been discussed as influential in the lives of students, it could be assumed that their influence extends to a student's academic self-concept. Another area of research in academic motivation is the relationship between student involvement and the development of academic self-concept.

House (2000) found that there was a slight correlation between the amount of time (in hours) that freshmen students spent speaking with teachers outside of the class and their self-confidence in their intelligence, their motivation to achieve, and their own perceptions of their creative abilities. Students' increased level of volunteer work in the year before they entered college was significantly related to their self-confidence in their intelligence

and with their motivation to achieve. Also, students' increased participation in other extracurricular groups and activities such as clubs was significantly positively related to the students' self-confidence in their intelligence and their concept of their own motivation to achieve. House (2000) stated that these results partially support the contention that student participation in extracurricular activities positively influences their academic self-concept and highlight the idea that students should be encouraged to participate in these activities. Michie, Glachan and Bray's (2001) research in the area of academic self-concept in higher education with 112 direct and re-entry undergraduates sought to understand the influence of factors such as age, gender, school experiences, and motivations for higher education participation. Re-entry students were students who had taken a break after high school before enrolling in an institution of higher education. Direct entry students were those who participated in higher education immediately after high school. Results confirmed that re-entry students were more likely to report more negative experiences in school than did direct entry students. Female undergraduates (both re-entry and direct entry) reported higher levels of stress than males. Female participants in this study were also less sure of peer evaluation of their academic ability than were males. Students whose motivation for entry into higher education was cognitive interest had the most positive academic self-concept. These students were also more likely to be the most confident in their academic ability as well as their overall satisfaction with college. In terms of motivation, those who were in college for the purpose of learning had more positive experiences than others. If a student's motivation for higher education participation was related to career goals then he/she was more likely to report higher levels of academic stress. Students who were participating in higher education for the social aspect were more doubtful of their academic ability (Michie, Glachan, & Bray, 2001).

According to several studies (for e.g., Guay, Larose and Boivin, 2004; Hamachek, 1995; Michie, Glachan, & Bray, 2001) academic self-concept is associated with academic achievement although it is unclear what the direction of this relationship is. While much of the early work on academic self-concept has focused on the early educational years, more recent work has investigated the academic self-concept with college samples (Fortson, 1997; House, 2000; Michie, Glachan, & Bray, 2001). Cokley et al. (2003) found that there may be differences in the way that academic self-concept measures perform among heterogeneous ethnic samples. Further research in the area of academic motivation would benefit from investigating possible cultural factors that affect the development of academic self-concept for ethnically diverse college populations; thus far there has been little research in this area (Fortson, 1997) and more so in Malaysia.

3.3 Perceived University Environment

Perceptions of the university environment have been shown to influence students' satisfaction with the college experience, academic performance and persistence/nonpersistence decisions (for e.g., Gloria & Ho, 2003; Davis, 1995; D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993). These perceptions include judgments about the general campus climate, the racial climate and the academic climate of an institution. For the purpose of this study, perceptions of the university environment will include a student's comfort in the academic setting, perceptions of whether or not the institution is meeting their academic, developmental and social needs, perceptions of the university as genuinely interested in a student's well-being and success, perceptions of the cultural fit and feeling connected or disconnected from the institution (Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 1996 in Gloria and Ho, 2003). Schulte, Thompson, Hayes, Noble and Jacobs (2001) investigated both undergraduate and faculty perceptions of the ethical climate of a university and the effect on retention. They defined an ethical climate as one that respects the individual, does not harm, benefits others, treats people fairly, and is trustworthy. They surveyed 281 undergraduate students and 37 faculties at a Midwestern metropolitan university with questions about faculty to student interactions, student to student interactions and the importance of an ethical climate in student retention. Results of the study seem to indicate that faculty rated faculty to student and student to student interactions more positively than students did. Both faculty and students surveyed believed that an ethical climate was vital to student retention.

3.4 Motivation

According to McCann & Garcia (1999) research in the area of academic motivation has identified both the internal and external motivating factors that influence a students' academic motivation. For example, Choy (2002) argues that social support and indirect motivation from friends plays a role in high school students' academic decisions as at-risk students with friends that plan to apply to college are more likely to apply as well. However, the influence of motivation does not cease from being vital to a student's academic experience once he/she has applied to an institution of higher education. Le, Casillas, Robbins and Langley (2005) postulate that theories of academic motivation can be categorized into two sets: achievement-as-goal and achievement-as drive theories. They cite that recent models of academic motivation have included both motivation and skill/strategy aspects. In a study of the individual differences in academic motivation, McCann and Garcia (1999) investigated the self-regulatory strategies that students use to stay focused on academic tasks. Self-regulation is the extent to which a student is an active participant in his/her learning experiences (Zimmerman, 1989). Specifically McCann and Garcia (1999) tested the utility of the Academic Volitional Strategy Inventory (AVSI), an instrument that was created to assess the control of motivation and strategies that college students use when distractions threaten their academic goals. They found that the items in the AVSI had good predictive value for the educational outcomes of students (McCann & Garcia, 1999). A study by Hwang, Echols, and Vrongistinos (2002) examined the academic motivation of 60 high achieving African American students at a Southern university. Results of the study provided evidence for the complex nature of high academic achievers' purpose and goals which include social and personal needs, intrinsic and extrinsic factors as well as goal orientations. Specifically, students in the study reported multiple motivational factors including social influences and enjoyment as their motivation for choosing their major and continuing their education in college as well as intrinsic and extrinsic reasons for studying. Hwang, Echols, and Vrongistinos (2002) note that a majority of the participants stated that part of their motivation for obtaining a degree in a specific area (major) was due to social concern and social responsibility and a desire to help society. The authors also state that because the participants were likely to report both extrinsic and positive future goals, these may act as motivational stimulants for studying and that these could also serve as motivating influences for college persistence.

3.5 Aspirations

Academic aspirations may be influence by both internal and external factors. Laanan (2003) investigated the degree aspirations of 13,000 freshman students enrolled in two-year private and public institutions and the degree to which internal and external factors influenced students' aspirations. One-third of the students surveyed stated that their aspiration was to receive an associate's degree and more than one-fourth stated that they eventually wanted to attain a bachelor's or master's degree. The authors acknowledge that students appear to be entering the two-year institutions with high academic aspirations and the goal to transfer to a four-year institution. There were also a no table percentage of students who stated that their degree aspiration was to obtain a doctoral degree. In a study that compared the university aspirations of a group of Australian rural students with a metropolitan group matched by age and SES, Shaw and Larson (2003) found that the university aspirations of the two groups were similar and recommended that the same outreach programs and services provided to metropolitan students should be available to rural children. Gasser, Larson, and Borgen's (2004) work on the contributions of personality to educational aspirations found support for the contention that the interest and personality scales that were related to educational goals were moderately correlated with a student's level of academic aspiration. They also found that specific areas of personality and interests were related to a student's plans for future academic experiences. This may suggests that achievement and performance may not be the only contributing factors to a student's academic aspirations. There are possibilities that the academic factors influencing students academic aspirations may be due to family, school and personal factors including social support, academic self-concept and perceptions of the university environment. It is difficult to separate a student's academic performance and

achievement from her/his academic aspirations as the aspirations serve as motivation for achievement. Academic persistence may also be influenced by social support as students who have a strong social support system are better able to face the challenges in their journey to achieve their academic goals. A student's academic self-concept may influence her/his academic programme and course decisions and this, in turn, may affect her/his grade point average and preparedness for university. Based on the discussion above, the following propositions were developed:

- To assess the level of perceived social support of the residential college students of UiTM, Shah Alam.
- To examine the level of academic self-concept of the residential college students of UiTM, Shah Alam.
- To determine the level of academic motivation of the residential college students of UiTM, Shah Alam.
- To assess the level of perceived university environment of the residential college students of UiTM, Shah Alam.
- To examine the level of academic aspiration of the residential college students of UiTM, Shah Alam.
- To explore the influence of perceived organizational support, academic self-concept, academic motivation, and perceived university environment on academic aspiration of the residential college students of UiTM, Shah Alam.
- To provide practical information for university administrators, college administrators, and students with recommendations for meeting the needs of those students who do have high academic aspirations as well as understand what could contribute to students' low academic aspirations.

4. Summary

To summarize, based on the discussion above, it is clear that previous and current research support the contention that the academic factors influencing students' academic aspirations are compounded by family, school and personal factors including social support, academic self-concept and perceptions of the university environment. To the best of the researchers' knowledge, there is hardly any published study found in Malaysia. Therefore, this study will attempt to assess the degree to which perceived social support, academic self-concept and perceptions of the university environment influence students' academic aspirations. The present study will assess the degree to which social support, academic self-concept and perceptions of the university environment influence a student's academic aspirations. It is hoped that the findings will provide practical information for university administrators, college administrators, and students with recommendations for meeting the needs of those students who do have high academic aspirations as well as understand what could contribute to students' low academic aspirations.

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