Incidences and Causal Factors of School Dropouts Among the Indigenous Youth in Malaysia

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Abstract

Education plays a far-reaching role in developmental growth of any society. This makes the development of human capital very crucial. In recognizing the pivotal role of education in development, the Malaysian government has made pragmatic efforts in the educational sector in order to ensure that her citizens have a good standard of living, attain prosperity and become productive irrespective of ethnicity, race or cultural affiliations. However, among Orang Asli; an indigenous minority group in Malaysia, educational achievement is still at a low level as a result of school dropouts. This has led to a lower quality of life and under-employment among other negative consequences among them.

In this context, this paper examines the phenomenon of school dropout and the factors that contribute to it as one of the most serious socio-economic dilemmas of this community.

It employs library-based as a research methodology. The paper reveals that aspects such as poor physical conditions, vicious social-cultural orientation, economic misfortune, agent of migration and parenting contribute to school drop outs. The paper thus recommends that measures be implemented to address this issue.

Keywords: Dropouts, Education, Orang Asli, Indigenous, Youth.

The Issue: The Phenomenon of School Dropout

Over the past years, the issue of school dropout has not only dominated the focal point of academics but is also perceived to be one of the most serious socio-economic dilemmas confronting the countries of the world which have led to a lower quality of life and under-employment among young people (Courtney and Dworsky, 2006; Archambaul et al., 2017; Tabuchi et al., 2018). Dropout also remains as one of the mortifying ecumenical issues that continue to affect the education system ransacking the lower social and economic strata (UNESCO, 2015; ILO, 2022; Kumar, 2023). School dropout happens when a student withdraws himself/herself from school at any level of education without a certificate to account for their education. It is an educational problem in many countries because of its negative consequences on society (Ressa and Andrews, 2022).

Dropout is a phenomenon which is connected with early school leaving (Mennen et al., 2022. As such, the phenomenon has received the attention of numerous organizations, scholars

and authors who have suggested various definitions. For instance, UNESCO (2020) defines dropout as "the proportion of students from the cohort who are enrolled in a particular class in a particular school year who are no longer enrolled in the next school year". Another study by Brunello and Paola (2014), has previously referred to dropout as the situation in which young adults put an end to their studies earlier than attaining senior secondary certificate as well as other individuals who at no time enrolled for any training or schoolwork. They went further to group dropout happenstance into two categories: namely, inclusive and exclusive. The inclusive dropout happens at the instance of the society's standard of education while the exclusive category relies heavily on a student that falls short in his studies. There onwards, he fails to proceed with his studies and complete it to the upper secondary education level prior to the age of 22 years (Blondal et al. 2009).

Dupéré et al. (2018), lend support to various conditions which synthesizes a dropout student. They include: the first condition is when a student presents an approved notice of discontinuing their course or schoolwork prior to completion of diploma studies. The next condition is when a student is crossing over to higher studies before completing their present studies. In this situation, however, many turn out not forging ahead with their studies. Moreover, those who forge do not all attain a diploma. The third scenario is when a student decides to stop his/her study programmes without giving prior notice to his/her institution neither opting nor requesting for a transfer. Besides, a student is also considered a dropout when such a student did not show up in the school for at least a month without a brief or justification.

Hjorth et al. (2016) refer to dropout as a situation in which a student abruptly discontinued his/her studies before the completion of the final exam. Eurostar (2020) views dropout or early school leaving as a situation in which a person within the age bracket of 18-24 has completed only secondary school studies and without advancing his study. Parviainen et al. (2020) avouch that dropout is the last lick of a prolonged process before putting an end to education. According to them, it materializes after a series of actions such as prime falling in with school adversities that may metamorphose into absenteeism and school disengagement. It may progressively modify social relationships, engagement and support as well as induce psychological or physical disorders and narcotics abuse in a view to unburden their imbroglios or rekindle their recreational activities and relaxation. Thereupon the chance for re-engaging in learning become slim in so much as all these antecedents, no doubt, will have modified and distorted the physical and mental abilities and capabilities of such individuals. Vancampfort et al. (2016) assert that consumption of alcohol and tobacco grossly sway the physical, psychical and psychomotor functions and performance.

Background to the Issue

Education is very pivotal to the development and progression of any country (Chellappan, 2018; Borgen & Borgen, 2015). This is because the bottom line of education to people and the world at large is dimensional and multifaced. It has been observed that education plays various and significant roles in enriching and advancing people's understanding in any setting or society. of themselves. Education also takes a lead role in guaranteeing social and economic advancement as well as improving earnings and livelihood (Rusmawati Said, 2016). Without prevarication, by no means any country on earth can reach sustainable development goals or achieve economic progress without having a high priority for and investing massively in human capital development. The Fourth goal of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) not only acknowledges the importance of education but also canvasses for its quality delivery, whose one of its varied targets is to make sure that each and every boy and girl complete free, equitable, and quality primary and secondary education. Three out of four children who were out of the extended labour force are in education or training which goes to show that even though the COVID-19 crisis caused some shifts in the distribution of young people across the various education and labour market categories, the broad picture remained unchanged.

In the meantime, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), reveals that around 30 million children drop out of school. This is one of the major problems the developing countries are grappling with (UNESCO, 2022). Substantiating this

assertion, emerging data from the U.S. Department of Education, the National Center for Education Statistics (2021) reveals that in the Philippines, there was an increase in the number of out-of-school children rising from 16.9% to 25.2% between January 2020 and April 2020. At the same time, in other countries like South Africa, UNICEF found that the number of students that have dropped out of school had skyrocketed in March 2020 from 250,000 to 750,000 in July 2021.

Every one out of ten schoolchildren in Uganda is out of school. While in Malawi, the dropout rate among secondary female students rose from 6.4% to 9.5% between 2020 and 2021. Every one out of ten schoolchildren in Uganda is out of school. Much as in Malawi, the dropout rate among secondary female students rose from 6.4% to 9.5% between 2020 and 2021. In Kenya, the rate of dropout was reported at 8% of boys and 16% of girls in a survey conducted among 4,000 respondents (UNESCO, 2022).

Meanwhile, in Malaysia, the report of the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2020) indicated that the gross dropout ratio of children and children aged 15 to 24 in 2016 was 11.7 per cent, while in 2017 and 2018 it was 11.8 per cent and 12.5 per cent respectively. The statistics have shown that the total number of children in 2018 to be 15.1 million, approximately 46.6 per cent of the total Malaysian population. This projects an exponential increase in the number of children by the year 2030. By then, the total number of children will eventually be more than half of the total population in the country. The scenario of dropout rate among pre-primary, primary and lower secondary schools in Malaysia was reported to have rolled back from 94 per cent to 91 per cent. By this estimate, all but one in ten children are out of school. The report went further to indicate that children within the age bracket of 14 and above who are considered to make it to the final year of lower secondary school are more likely to be out of school put alongside other age groups.

Research from previous studies shows that the problem of youth dropping out of education and training is caused by various factors. According to a study from Rusmawati Said (2016), the main hindering factor for youth dropping out of education or following skills training is income or financial resources. For example, the high family wage burden leads to dropouts and restricts the youth's interest in training or furthering their education. Also, the data released by the Malaysian Institute of Economic and Democratic Affairs (IDEAS) in 2017, almost 60 percent of dropout students are from low-income families. The majority of low-income parents have financial problems providing perfect education facilities for their children, resulting in them having to work to help increase the family's income. In specific terms, despite intensifying efforts and investments made by the Malaysian government in the educational sector over the years education gaps persist most especially between Orang Asli children and non-indigenous children till the present day (IDEAS, 2020; UNICEF Malaysia, 2019; WN Jazmina, 2023).

Studies related to the problem of Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET) were initially introduced in Britain and then spread to other developed countries. For example, Elder (2015), who has conducted a NEET study in 41 countries, NEET studies have also been conducted in Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and several other countries. Although research on the problem of NEET youth in Malaysia is still lacking, this matter has received the attention of the government, which realizes that the NEET issue is a national problem and a social issue that worries the youth and will have a significant negative impact on the economic growth and prosperity of the country. A look at the available statistics of young people not employed in most countries of the world reveal that approximately almost half of them aged 15–24 years had not been in education or training (ILO, 2022). Specifically, according to ILO (2022), almost one-fourth, approximately five per cent, of all young people in the not in employment, education or training (NEET) category were unemployed. At the same time, three quarters, approximately 15.6%, of them were off the labour force. A vast majority with educational or training status were outside the labour force, which encompassed approximately 46.9% of all young people, while a small portion was employed (around 6.7%) or unemployed (close to 1% of all young people).

These figures portray that there is an uphill task ahead of all young people in finding a job (ILO, 2022) seeing that the unemployment quota of youth in education or training is parallel with those not currently in education or training. In this context, this paper examines the phenomenon of school dropout and the factors that contribute to it as one of the most serious socio-economic dilemmas among the Orang Asli community in Malaysia.

Review of Literature: Orang Asli and Incidence of Youth Dropout

The Orang Asli, an indigenous community, are a group of primitive people of Malaysia. As their name suggests in the Malay language, they are regarded as the original people in Malaysia Peninsular by virtue of their long stay in this region which dated back to 5,000 BC (Hill et al., 2006; Endicott, 2016). In Peninsular Malaysia, the population of Orang Asli as of 2018 stood at 178,197 (0.55%) of the total country population (JAKOA 2018b; DOSM 2019). Among the states in the country, Pahang, Perak and Selangor have a greater number of Orang Asli residing in them with corresponding percentages of 37.9%, 29.9% and 9.9%. Nevertheless, they are a minute group compared to the entire Malaysian population. Malaysia has a confluence of heterogeneous indigenous communities comprised of 18 sub-ethnic groups (Kensiu, Temiar, Kintak, Semai, Temuan, Semelai, Jakun, Lanoh, Semoq Beri, Jahai, Che Wong, Bateq, Orang Kanaq, Orang Kuala Mendriq, Jah Hut, Mah Meri, Orang Seletar) with different and diverse cultures. However, the three main ethnic groups include Senoi (54.9%), Proto-Malay (42.3%) and Negrito (2.8%) (Asmawi et al., 2023; JAKOA 2018). All in all, the Orang Asli lives in 853 villages across Peninsular Malaysia.

In Malaysia, just like in other countries of the world, the rights to education are guaranteed under the Education Act 1996 Section 29(A), which asserts that basic education is compulsory for every Malaysian child inclusive of Orang Asli children. Furthermore, the Orang Asli's right to education is also protected by the Federal Constitution and the Aboriginal Peoples Act 1954. All these enactments are indicators of rights for the indigenous people, especially the rights to education and self-determination. However, the Malaysia Ministry of Education (MoE) reveals that the incidence of dropout was more prevalent among the indigenous children: remarkably the Orang Asli children and less prevalent among non-indigenous children. For instance, at the national level, the number of students that make it to the final year of secondary school in 2008 was at 72% as opposed to only 30% of Orang Asli students (Nor et al. 20111; MOE 2016). Even though in recent years there is a revamp about this scenario, there remains a disparity between average national secondary school completion as compared to Orang Asli students.

However, Orang Asli students who completed secondary education in 2014 upsurge to 59 percent (MoE 2015). In stark contrast, the national progression rate of students from primary to secondary education in 2018 stood at 96.8% as compared to 76.7% of Orang Asli students' progression rate (MoE 2019). Specifically, empirical analysis through research by IDEAS (2021) shows that dropout cases among Orang Asli students are more often than not in some states. Further evidence reveals a disparity regarding the completion of education among these states. States like Kelantan and Terengganu have higher incidences of dropouts than Johor, Kedah and Perak. Explicitly, the figures show that in 2018, the percentage of dropout rates after Year 6 in Kelantan and Terengganu was 41% was the highest, while Perak and Kedah were 3% each and Johor has only 1% of dropouts. At a glance, the above disparities put across the different levels of supervision and assistance provided in supporting the educational programmes at the community level under the aegis of state and district levels as well as non-governmental organizations and civil societies. This brings to the fore the need to analyses causal factors of school dropouts among the indigenous youth in Malaysia.

Research Methodology

This paper employs library-based research methods to collect data and information to achieve the goal of research related to the factors that cause youth dropout in education and

training in Malaysia. Materials are found based on the titles of published materials to obtain information. They involve books, journals, articles that support the examination.

Findings
Dropout Among the Orang Asli: The Causal Nexus

The following outline some factors that contribute to the problem of youth dropping out among the Orang Asli.

Poor Physical Condition

According to Kagamimori et al. (2009) leading the causes of children and youth dropout is poor physical conditions. Poor physical conditions manifest in such spheres as poor health, malnutrition, gloomy outlook, low spirit and chronic diseases. Good physical status portrays a healthy and energetic being who is not only ready to learn but also learn at a pace. An unhealthy or poorly fed student cannot have stamina let alone learn well. In a nutshell, those whose physical conditions are below par are more likely to drop out of school Zakaria Stapa (2012). Basically, physical and psychological retardments have been a serious cause of school dropout most especially in rural areas. It is important to note that some countries and non-governmental organizations are putting in place strategies and programmes to curtail the rate of dropout.

Vicious Social-cultural Orientation

In juxtaposition with a poor physical condition is vicious social-cultural orientation. Seemly social-cultural orientation gives a good sense of direction, adaption and outlook of society. However, in a situation where a society is devoid of this value, it will be problematic for the society to move ahead. Many societies in most developing countries are characterized by poor social-cultural orientation in the sense that they only give education to the males at the instance of females. The arrangement of most peoples and cultures is based on the understanding that the males are only the breadwinners of the family that need to be educated and the female ones are to be sidelined considering the fact that they will later only focus on family affairs like choirs. However, these days some individuals are breaking such jinx by not only sending their female ones to schools but also allowing them to complete their studies. According to Bandura (1997), the behaviour of teenagers is often influenced by their social experiences during childhood.

In the same manner Wan Nur Izzati Hazwani Kashfi (2022) noted that the family members' educational background plays a significant role and is a great determiner on how children study. Of course, among any other members of the family, the education status of the mother is surmising and has an exceeding influence. The worthwhile situation observed by Rahman (2019), was that in a circumstance where mothers are more educated cases of dropout are usually low-down. They leave no stone unturned in ensuring that their wards and children completed their studies.

Economic Misfortune

Unequivocally, another noticeable challenge engendering school dropout is economic misfortune. Generally, there is no mincing word that the problem of poverty is bitten hard on many families This is because, despite government schools being free of charge for Malaysian students, yet umpteen family households lack the financial means to offset the supplementary expenses (such as food and transportation) to get their children to enroll in school (OECD, 2013; UNICEF, 2018). This is to confirm that the standard of living of many people including the Orang Asli is still shabby. This was even supported by the speech made this year by Rafizi Ramli, Malaysia's Economy Minister who affirmed that absolute poverty still ravages the country while its index stood at 5.6 as of 2019, and the majority of individuals in this category are from the Bumiputera community. He further made a breakdown that the poverty rate for

Bumiputera stood at 7.2%, while Indians come next with 4.8% and the Chinese took the third place with 1.4%.

According to data released by the Malaysian Institute of Economic and Democratic Affairs (IDEAS) in 2017, almost 60 percent of dropout students are from low-income families. Likewise, Asad (2009) in the case of Bangladesh where people living below the poverty line were stated to be 31.5 per cent, tendencies are high that people will spend their earnings buying essential commodities just like food instead of incurring the cost of education. Added to this was that most children and youth s have no alternative but to join the workforce to earn money for livelihood. This may have been the unfortunate rationality behind the prevalence of child labour in many countries. ILO (2021) in their report pointed out that children in child labour in the world stood at 160 million as of 2020 of which sixty-three million (39.4%) were girls and at the same time, ninety-seven million (60.6%) were boys. The data further revealed that in the world, for the past 4 years, the ratio of children who drop out of school to join child labour has remained constant while nearly half of them engage in hazardous jobs that openly put their immunity, safety, health and moral development at risk. In a similar contribution by Sarker et al. (2019) and Gypen et al. (2017) 22.9% of child labourers in Bangladesh are involved in life threaten work all in a bid to support their families.

Agent of Migration

It is noteworthy that migration is one of the major dilemmas of dropout. It contributes a lot in many cases for the children and youth to not be able to complete their study programmes. By its nature, habitual migration of individuals most especially the parent here and there seeking livelihood has a great imprint on the family unit and it can further reduce the chance of most children and youth attaining diploma certificates. It jeopardizes and exposes the children to the vulnerability of all sorts thereon lacking a good value system and the needed companionship. Added to this, is that the absence of family members at home to monitor and supervise the doings of these children and youth can create a chance for them to neglect school.

Parenting and Family Factors

The education of a parent or heads of family households indicates their educational concern and how they manage the education matters in their respective family. Meanwhile, parental education is positively related to their perception of managing their children's educational matters (Samad 2003; Yahaya, 2012). It is evident in the literature that the education status of the parent has a consequential role to play in the children's enrollment in school. Yancey (2015) pointed out that the educational status of parents is a significant predictor of the educational accomplishment of their children.

The inference is that uneducated parents have less preference and priority for education and its adjunct, hence, their children are more vulnerable to dropout compared to those literate parents' children (Yancey, 2015; Dupéré et al., 2018). The demeanour of parents who has formal education goes a long way in complimenting their children's education seeing its essentiality unlike parents with no formal education who perhaps regard education as a poor and unworthy investment and thus put their children to work straight off (UNICEF Malaysia, 2019). For instance, Wan Nur Izzati Hazwani Kashfi (2022) reported in his research study that the earnest and confident children develop in the learning process is attributed to the motivation and enthusiasm their parents provided. This will mean that the family environment is a factor capable of bringing into bear the accomplishment of youth in education and training.

Conclusions

This paper has made efforts to expound the phenomenon of dropout which denotes discontinuity in education while also highlighting the importance of education as a catalyst for development in every society including the rural community. It also analyses incidence and factors of dropout in Orang Asli communities in peninsular Malaysia. Consequently, the paper has made an attempt to accentuate certain causes and broad factors such as poor physical condition, vicious social-cultural orientation, economic misfortune, agent of migration and

parenting factors that bring into being a case of dropout. To this end, this paper proffer that certain steps need to be taken to drastically reduce imperil of dropout. This, of course, is necessary for feasible human growth and sustainable national development. Having divulged the incidence of dropout among Orang Asli youth and pinpointed the causal factors that have hindered the fruitful accomplishment of educational study as aimed by the Malaysian government, this paper recommends that concerted and well interaction should be established between various relevant stakeholders in both educational and socio-cultural sectors development. As such, this consortium which will comprise governmental agencies, non-governmental agencies (NGOs) and religious bodies will forge ahead to identify causes and solutions related to the Orang Asli children and their education concerning the cultural diversity of the Orang Asli.

Besides, economic incentives and measures need to be put in place to lessen the poverty rate among the parents of Orang Asli children as this will not only curb the incidence of dropout but to mention it will curtail the menace of child labour. As a form of incentive to encourage the completion of educational study, the vocational skills element needs to be integrated into the school curriculum and ensure its full implementation in all Orang Asli schools irrespective of their locale. The problem of migration needs to be checked headlong to make the breadwinner, head of the family or other family providers oversee the completion of the children's educational pursuit. Until all these measures are put in place, meaning and needed achievement towards reducing the incidence of dropout in Orang Asli communities may remain a mirage.

Acknowledgements

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