

Exploring Potential Ways to Increase the Level of Education and Provide Upskilling for Rural Youth Community

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Abstract—Following the emergence of a new era of technical and vocational education and training (TVET) in Malaysia, the youth community should grasp the opportunity to equip themselves with knowledge and skills. However, the nation's youth, especially those living in the rural areas; tend to be unaware of the importance of TVET in providing them a better future. Therefore, this study aims to identify potential ways to increase the level of education and provide up skilling for youth in the rural areas. A survey study was conducted among 60 youths in three villages in one of the eastern states in Malaysia. The data were obtained using questionnaire, and the responses were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The result indicates that the rural youth have taken various initiatives to pursue higher levels of education in educational institutions and upgrade their skills at technical training colleges. The data also indicated those youths were highly interested to further their studies or obtain skill training in the fields related to agriculture and entrepreneurship. However, they faced several barriers to continue their studies, especially in terms of finance. In conclusion, rural youth have a high potential to increase their education level, and we believe TVET can give them a better future. The implication of this statement is that, various parties should look into this issue to help rural youth have better opportunities and wider access to training colleges at a minimum cost.

Keywords—rural youth, skill training, technical and vocational education.

I. INTRODUCTION

THE future success of a nation depends largely on the current youth community, who will be the future leaders of the country. In line with the nation's vision and the national aims to be a fully developed country by 2020, Malaysian youth regardless of race and religion should work together in realising this goal. Since they are the future leaders, youth should equip themselves with the necessary knowledge and skills to help them be successful in their future careers. For this reason, the Malaysian authorities have planned a strategy through several human capital development programmes, as

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proposed in the Ninth Malaysia Plan (9MP) [1]. This programme supports the national aims to equip and enable youth to lead the nation and to achieve greater heights, and as such the nation's youth need to be highly knowledgeable and skilful.

According to [1], youth are individuals between the ages of 15 and 40 years. They are estimated at 12 million, which constitutes 42.5% of the total population of Malaysia, which was about 28.3 million in 2011 [2]. Additionally, in 2011, a total of 7.6 million youth have been contributing to the economy and national productivity in various employment sectors, while 0.3 million were unemployed. From this number, the department has reported that 5.2 million youth were located in urban areas, while only 2.4 million youth were living in the rural areas. These figures indicate that the youth "community" has a great influence on the country's development as they are contribute significantly to it. However, the imbalance between urban and rural youth contributions might result in a larger gap in terms of productivity. One possible way to stimulate rural youth involvement is through the TVET sectors.

Following the emergence of a new era of TVET in Malaysia, the government has broadened the opportunities for the youth community to equip themselves with knowledge and skills; the aim is to ensure they can compete with their urban counterparts at national level or even at global level. The government believes TVET is one of the pathways that can potentially play a significant role in increasing the level of education and in upskilling. However, youth, especially those in the rural areas are generally less concerned with education and skills and do not see the importance of furthering their studies. A preliminary observation indicated that these youths are unskilled and mainly involved in the traditional farming activities, while some work as factory production operators, and some are unemployed. Therefore, this study was conducted to identify the youth's background and explore their initiatives and interest to further their studies. The study aims to identify potential ways to increase their level of education and provide upskilling for youth in the rural areas through TVET pathways.

A. Malaysian TVET Initiatives

Future workplace capacity and challenges require workers, who are holistically competent, where hands-on skills have become a pre-requirement in most technical and engineering fields. In [3] suggests that skill training has been identified to be essential to determine graduates' survival. For that reason, the Malaysian government has promoted an educational transformation in 2013, following several gradual initiatives regarding the concern over national TVET sectors. This is in response to the demand for skilled workers, as well as the aspirations of the government to attain the status of a high-productivity and high-income country, which is driven by modern industrial economy.

Malaysia has seen several global examples such as the Finnish government, who is concerned with providing equal accessibility to education and training for their entire population [4]. Similarly in Australia, much investment has been allocated to form a unified Vocational Education and Training (VET) system, which has been implemented in school and right up to institutions of higher learning [5]. The idea of adopting a National Dual Training System (NDTS) is also an initiative to strengthen the national TVET sectors [6]. Also, the government has been committed to improve the TVET through a series of large national budget allocations in 2003, 2005, and in 2008 [7]. Additionally, as part of the government's continual efforts to improve the TVE field, a new "rebranding" strategy were introduced to stimulate the local TVE sectors, which involved polytechnic and community college upgrading. The implication is that the capacity of TVET institutions in Malaysia has increased for school leavers, offering many places for knowledge and skill training.

Generally in the Malaysian TVET system, school leavers have more opportunities to take part in TVET to obtain a pre-university qualification. In fact, for those who are keen on pursuing technical fields, they can continue their studies at vocational colleges as early as 16 years old and will be awarded a diploma in skills within five years upon successful completion of the courses [8, 9, and 10]. Moreover, there are 30 government-funded polytechnics and 68 community colleges, administered directly by the Department of Polytechnic Education and Department of Community College Education of the Ministry of Higher Education [11]. Successful completion of the programmes leads to the award of a certificate, diploma, or an advanced diploma qualification. In addition, many training institutions are available such as Advance Technology Education Centre (ADTECH), Industrial Training Institute, MARA High Skills College and National Youth Skills Institute (IKBN).

II. METHODOLOGY

According to [12], the survey design is appropriate, as it can descriptively make assertions about a large population. The survey was conducted using questionnaires to obtain the relevant information for this study. Sampling was conducted in two stages; the first stage was using purposive sampling to

select three villages in one of the eastern states in Malaysia. The second stage was using random sampling to select youths who fulfilled the following criteria: youth aged between 15 and 45 years; and must been seen hanging around during working days, and thus are assumed to be unemployed. According to [13], purposive sampling is suitable for a preliminary study, and the researcher has to use self-judgment to choose respondents whom they deem meet the criteria. Finally, a total of 60 questionnaires were collected and the data were analysed.

A. Instrument

The questionnaire for data collection comprises 4 parts: Part A = respondent background, Part B = initiative to further studies, Part C = interest in area of education and skill training, and Part D = reason for not furthering studies. In parts B, C, and D, items were adapted from a previous study conducted by [14]. Items in Part B were based on access and properties to information, and study opportunities in training institutions. Items in Part C were based on majoring courses available in the current technical training institutions such as vocational colleges, community colleges, and polytechnics. Items in Part D were categorised into sub-constructs, namely family, finance, and personal factors. Respondents were asked to indicate their agreement with the given statements based on the five-point Likert scale, with "1" for strongly disagree and "5" for strongly agree in Part B and Part D. Since a good instrument must be highly reliable [15], the instrument was tested using reliability analysis. The reliability level according to the Cronbach's Alpha method indicated that the reliability of the instrument as a whole is 0.75, which is acceptable as it is above the minimum of 0.6 [15].

B. Data Analysis

Data from the questionnaires were analysed using percentage and frequencies, as well as using mean scores and standard deviation (SD) in order to conduct data interpretation. Data obtained through the five-point Likert scales were analysed using mean scores and standard deviation. The mean scores were interpreted according to three classification levels as indicated in **Table 1.0** (Chan et al., 2005).

TABLE I
MEAN SCORES INTERPRETATION

Mean	Level interpretation
1.00 – 2.33	low
2.34 – 3.66	medium
3.67 – 5.00	High

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A total of 60 questionnaires were completed by respondents and were analysed. Out of the 60 respondents, 63% of all the respondents are females with 38 respondents, while males make up 37% with 22 respondents. 46.7% of them are in the age range of 21 to 25 years. It is interesting to note that 71.7%

of the 60 respondents, who completed the questionnaire, possessed Malaysian Certificate of Education (upper secondary school) as the highest level of education certificate (**Table 2**). Only a few of them (1.7%) are degree holders, who were actively seeking a job. Moreover, the majority of the respondents (55%) did not have any formal skill training from training institutions. They worked as farmers and a few of them worked as production operators in the factory, earning around RM500 to RM1000 per month.

TABLE II
RESPONDENT ACADEMIC BACKGROUND

Academic background	Number
Lower Secondary Assessment (PMR)	2
Certificates	5
Malaysian Certificate of Examination (SPM)	43
Diploma	6
Degree	1
Malaysia Higher Education Certificates (STPM)	3
Total	60

A. Further Study Initiatives

In Part B, respondents indicate a high level of initiative taken to further their studies, recording a mean value of 3.84 (SD = 0.41). Item 15 “I am always looking for an opportunity to attend skill training” showed the highest mean score of 4.13 (SD = 0.39). On the other hand, the lowest mean score (SD = 0.11) was for the item “I have used several ways to further my studies”. The list of items with the highest scores is presented in **Table 3**.

B. Area of Interest

Respondents also rated the scales in Part C regarding their interest in the area of further studies. Agriculture was highly rated with a mean score of 3.68 (SD = 0.45). The second top-rated area was culinary skills, with a medium mean score of 3.65 (SD = 0.51). The other areas and their scores are presented in **Table 4**.

TABLE III
INITIATIVE TO FURTHER STUDIES

Items	Mean score	SD	Int.
I am always seeking an opportunity to further my studies in skill training area	4.08	0.22	High
I consult a person who is knowledgeable regarding furthering my studies	3.90	0.13	High
I have taken many initiatives to further my studies	3.90	0.09	High
I am always sharing information regarding training centres with my friends	3.93	0.31	High

TABLE IV
AREA OF INTEREST

Area of interest	Mean score	SD	Int.
Mechanical engineering	3.26	0.21	Medium
Civil engineering	2.98	0.23	Medium
Electrical engineering	3.00	0.13	Medium
Entrepreneur	3.59	0.32	Medium
Agriculture	3.68	0.45	High
Culinary	3.65	0.51	Medium
Computer and multimedia	2.86	0.09	Medium

C. Barrier to Further Study

In Part D, several barriers to further studies were identified, which involved family, financial matters, and personal factors. For example, respondents gave higher ratings (mean score = 3.93; SD=0.23) for the item “I am the only man in my family so that I have to work for them”. Interestingly, respondents gave a medium rating of 3.33 (SD = 0.29) for the item “my parents cannot afford financial support for me to further my studies”. The details of the items are presented in **Table 5**.

TABLE V
BARRIERS TO FURTHER STUDIES

Item	Mean score	SD	Int.
I like to stay in my hometown with my friends	3.88	0.11	High
I like to work rather than further my studies	3.93	0.09	High
My parents cannot afford financial support for me to further my studies	3.33	1.01	Medium
Further studies do not guarantee a better job	3.00	0.34	Medium
I am the only man in my family so that I have to work for them	3.93	0.53	High

IV. DISCUSSION

Females dominate the number of youth who do not further their studies (attend college or skill training institution), when compared with their male counterparts. There might be a reason behind this finding. According to [14], it is possible that female youth have limited opportunities to further their studies due to domestic reasons such as early marriage, family matters, or the need to care for their children. These youths typically stay at home and manage their family matters; hence, they tend to lose contact with their friends and miss out on important information concerning opportunities to further their studies.

Youths have taken an initiative to attend college or training institute, while some have been continually looking for an opportunity to further their studies. Our findings indicated that youths have attended several seminars and carnivals, for example “Karnival Jom Masuk U!” conducted by the ministry. The carnival was conducted to disseminate information and opportunities by introducing educational institutions,

providing information about the programmes offered, and offering education financial [16]. The most important aim that must be achieved is to deliver precise and correct information to prospective students. Information from friends might not accurate, especially regarding the exact fees for training institution and sources of financial support available. In view of the initiatives taken by youths to further their studies, there is great potential to provide them with higher levels of education and upskilling.

Findings regarding area of interest to further studies are in line with those found by [14]. Rural youth are typically interested in being involved in the informal sectors, including working as production operators in the factory, running a roadside stall, and working on a farm. They are involved in such activities for a living and mainly to support family expenses. According to [17], the selection of education stream must be according to individual interest, in order for youths to succeed in that particular field. There are many opportunities for youths to further their studies in areas such as agriculture, culinary skills and entrepreneurship since many programmes relevant to these three sectors are offered in the TVET institutions.

Issues of family, financial, and personal factors must be solved in order to maximise rural youth's potential to increase the level of education and upskilling. The government and authorities have provided scholarship opportunities and financial aid through several bodies such as National Higher Education Fund (PTPTN) [18]. Funds are also allocated to finance and subsidise public training institutions such as community colleges. Meanwhile, family problems and personal factors need to be managed by the youths themselves.

V. CONCLUSION

This study explores the potential ways to increase the level of education and provide upskilling for youth in the rural areas. Findings indicated that rural youth are highly interested to further their studies or obtain skill training in the fields related to agriculture and entrepreneurship. Several barriers faced by these youths to continue their studies, especially in terms of finance, can be overcome by providing clear and precise information through a proper channel such as seminar or promotion carnival; moreover, it is vital to ensure all efforts do not merely focus on youth but also involve their family members. In conclusion, rural youth have a high potential to increase their education level, and we believe TVET can give them a better future. The implication of this statement is that, various parties should look into this issue to help rural youth have better opportunities and wider access to training colleges at a minimum cost.

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