

# Students Dropout in Rural Schools in Sarawak: Causes and Proposed Solutions

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## Abstract

The Ministry of Education Malaysia was established to reduce the education gap in Malaysia by providing education to all regardless of background. However, education issues, particularly student dropout, are becoming increasingly concerning at all levels of study. This paper aims to identify the issues and challenges influencing student dropout in rural schools in Lubok Antu, Sarawak. Based on the literature review, there are several issues and challenges affecting student dropout, including administration, infrastructure, and issues related to students. This paper also proposes strategies to address these issues based on findings from previous studies. Further research is recommended to provide a comprehensive conclusion with theoretical, policy, and practical implications for all stakeholders involved.

**Keywords:** Dropout, Issues, Challenges, Parents, Teachers, School Authorities, Administrators, Infrastructure, Students.

## Introduction

Recently, issues related to student attendance at school have been frequently discussed. Low school attendance and dropout issues must be addressed early to prevent them from escalating into critical problems later on. Student dropout in schools can have a significant impact on a school's performance and on the students' own development. Therefore, issues of student dropout and absenteeism should be tackled from the primary school level to prevent them from spreading to higher education levels. There are many causes of dropout issues. Consequently, all parties must play a role in preventing and reducing these problems. The effects of these issues also include a decline in student discipline and an increase in social problems among students. If not addressed, this problem can also affect the academic performance of the students. When students do not attend school, it indirectly disrupts their attendance and their learning.

The Ministry of Education Malaysia has introduced new education policies and objectives to address changes in the national education system. Logically, the government is trying to reduce the educational gap between urban and rural students, including those in remote areas. The Ministry of Education Malaysia strives to ensure that all children, regardless of location, gender, ethnicity, or socioeconomic background, have the opportunity to receive education up to the end of primary school. Since 2012, the government has approved a policy to provide free education to specific groups categorized into three income brackets: Below 40 (B40), Middle 40 (M40), and Top 20 (T20) (Subra et al., 2019). Additionally, Article 12 of the Malaysian Constitution states that every Malaysian citizen must not be discriminated against in obtaining formal education. Article 8 of the Malaysian Constitution states that every Malaysian citizen has equal rights to formal education, regardless of their religion, race, origin, gender, or social status (Malaysian Constitution, 2013).

As education contributes to the country's economic growth, the quality of education is crucial. Human resources with knowledge and high skills develop through education. The education system must meet economic and business needs and produce creative, productive, and capable human capital. This is because human capital generated from the education system serves as a source of energy and a tool for the country's economic growth and development. Currently, economic growth is driven by the education sector, which requires high energy usage and sustainable growth. The transition from a middle-income country to a high-income country is significant (Norkhatijah et al., 2012). In an era driven by scientific advancement, Malaysia needs knowledgeable individuals to ensure balanced long-term development and economic growth.

### **Concept/Definition/Theory/Model**

#### **Definition**

According to the Kamus Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka Fourth Edition, "Dropouts" is defined as falling behind, particularly in progress. In this context, "Dropouts" refers to falling behind in acquiring knowledge within an educational institution. Dropout in schools means students lag behind in gaining knowledge through teaching and facilitation at school. This knowledge acquisition process is crucial for the holistic development of a student, not just intellectually, but also emotionally, spiritually, and physically. Students need to attend school to gain knowledge and skills to compete globally. According to the Malaysia Education Development Plan 2013-2025, students need six key traits to compete globally: knowledge, thinking skills, leadership skills, bilingual skills, ethics and spirituality, and national identity. This aligns with the National Education Philosophy (FPK).

#### **Theory/Model**

In this writing, two theories are used: Vygotsky's Constructivist Theory, which relates to students' learning styles, and Jean Piaget's Cognitive Learning Theory, which explains behavior.

#### **Vygotsky's Constructivism Theory**

Vygotsky's Constructivist Theory, authored by Vygotsky (1896-1934), explains how students learn. One aspect of this theory suggests that students do not merely receive knowledge passively from teachers but use their own knowledge and experiences. This theory combines Vygotsky's Constructivist Theory (Zone of Proximal Development - ZPD) with three

learning style models: visual, auditory, and kinesthetic (VAK). The combination aims to identify the most common learning styles among children and determine whether they can solve problems with the help of others or on their own, given that everyone has different backgrounds, experiences, interactions, and cultures.

According to the VAK model, each individual has three types of learning styles: visual, auditory, and kinesthetic. However, each person will choose the style that is most effective for themselves. Learning occurs through play, formal instruction, and collaboration with more skilled peers. Successful experiences and high self-confidence affect students' motivation to learn. In constructivist theory, the focus of teaching is student-centered, with the teacher acting as a guide or facilitator. Knowledge is constructed through scaffolding techniques, where students learn through social interaction with their peers. This theory suggests that teachers must carefully plan teaching and learning activities, tailoring them to the students' abilities, thinking processes, and language levels.

### **Cognitive Learning Theory (Jean Piaget)**

Cognitive Learning Theory (Jean Piaget) is used to explain behavior. This theory focuses on mental processes such as observation, knowledge, and understanding. Learning and development activities in the classroom often use cognitive learning theory. To enhance students' cognitive development, teachers must master and apply this theory in their teaching. Wolfgang Kohler, Jerome Bruner, Ausubel, and Gagne are among the pioneers of cognitive learning theory. These researchers conducted various studies and experiments to determine effective learning methods. With this research, educators can apply these theories in their teaching practices.

One method is to provide students with opportunities to "discover" relationships. Discovery learning encourages students' creativity, intuition, and imagination. Additionally, teachers need to understand the prior knowledge that students possess before conducting teaching and learning activities (PdP). They should also relate this existing knowledge to the new information being taught. In this context, the teacher acts as a guide or facilitator. Moreover, teachers must recognize that during teaching and learning, each student may use different learning modes. According to Jerome Bruner, these modes include: the enactive mode based on action, the iconic mode based on images, and the symbolic mode based on language. According to Tar & Mahmud (2021), teachers should provide teaching aids that match their students' cognitive abilities. For instance, if a teacher wants to teach flower arrangement, they might provide students with flower buds and the necessary tools for arranging them. This approach not only makes learning easier to understand and remember but also creates a pleasant learning environment. Teaching aids should also be appropriate for the students' developmental stage. Teachers must consider the students' age and class ability level when selecting teaching aids.

In the teaching and learning process, teachers can also use advance organizers. Examples of advance organizers include problem-solving and solution maps, spider diagrams, branches, cycles, fishbone diagrams, flowcharts, and tree diagrams. Research shows that i-think maps help students retain lessons better. Therefore, as educators, we should enhance the use of mind maps during teaching to help students understand and remember what is taught more effectively, particularly for those with weaker learning abilities.

### **Relevant Policies**

In the 11th Malaysia Plan, Strategic Core 3 outlines that the Ministry of Education Malaysia (KPM) should reduce school dropout rates and ensure universal enrollment by 2020. The Malaysia Education Development Plan (PPPM) 2013–2025 aims to ensure all children have access to quality education. A key initiative is the Enhancement of Access from Preschool to Upper Secondary, which focuses on increasing enrollment at all educational levels and reducing student dropout rates.

Despite KPM implementing various programs to boost enrollment, dropout issues in primary and secondary schools persist. KPM initiated early detection of at-risk students in 2016. These students are currently in the education system but are at high risk of dropping out before completing their education.

Factors contributing to dropout include deficiencies in basic skills (reading, writing, arithmetic), failing subjects, repeated disciplinary issues, and lack of motivation. Family factors such as low household income, low parental education levels, and minimal parental involvement in school programs also contribute to dropout risks.

KPM aims for schools to identify students facing issues that might lead to dropping out as early as possible. Schools use the Guidelines for Managing At-Risk Students (GPMBC) as a reference to address dropout issues. The GPMBC provides instructions for schools to manage at-risk students effectively and ensure they remain in school until they complete their secondary education.

### **Importance**

This KPM policy aims to ensure that all students remain in the education system until they complete both primary and secondary schooling. Additionally, it seeks to help schools identify and manage at-risk students effectively and systematically, with continuous monitoring by the State Education Department (JPN), District Education Office (PPD), and schools.

This writing also aims to identify issues and challenges related to parents, teachers, school management/administrators/infrastructure, and students. Furthermore, it seeks to explore solutions to address these issues to curb and reduce student dropout in rural schools in Sarawak.

### **Issues and Challenges**

A survey was conducted at a school in the rural area of Lubok Antu to gather data and identify the causes of the issues. The majority of the student population at this school is of Iban ethnicity. The school faces problems with student dropout and absenteeism. A survey involving interviews with administrators, teachers, and implementation team members was conducted at the school.

### **Issues and Challenges Related to Parents**

Parents play a crucial role as they are the closest to students at home when the students are not at school. They are responsible for educating and guiding their children at home. They are also the ones who should instill good values and a love for school to motivate

their children to attend school regularly. The following are insights shared by the respondents involved:

*"Parents lack awareness of the importance of education for their children. The cost of transportation to and from school is quite high as parents need to buy boat fuel weekly for school commutes."*

Respondent A (Dormitory Management Assistant)

*"Parents face financial issues in sending their children to school. Dropout and absenteeism are partly due to the students' long commute by boat, taking three hours, or up to five hours on foot."*

Respondent B (Islamic Education Teacher and Year 2 Class Teacher)

*"Parents have low awareness of the importance of education. Family economic problems also contribute to dropout and absenteeism."*

Respondent C (Year 4 Class Teacher)

*"Dropout issues may stem from family problems, such as divorce or children being cared for by grandparents while parents work in the city."*

Respondent D (Preschool Management Assistant)

*"Parents lack awareness of the importance of education for their children."*

Respondent E (Acting Senior Assistant of Student Affairs)

*"Most dropout students come from troubled families, such as those with divorced parents, or where a parent has passed away and the student lives with guardians (grandparents or relatives). Additionally, parents often lack awareness of the importance of education, leading them not to send their children to school. Furthermore, poverty and the long distance between home and school also result in parents or guardians being unable to afford transportation costs for sending their children to school."*

Respondent F (Dormitory Management Assistant)

*"Parents are reluctant to send their children to school due to the distance."*

Respondent G (Preschool Teacher)

*"The lack of commitment from guardians who are indifferent in fully caring for the students. This is because most of these students are looked after by their grandparents while their parents are busy working in the city. Parents are unaware of their children's development because they do not live under the same roof. They only have the opportunity to see their children during school holidays."*

Respondent H (Co-curricular Assistant Principal)

*"Family poverty is one of the causes of student dropout. The long distance to school is also a contributing factor. Additionally, parents' lack of concern for their children's education further contributes to student dropout."*

Respondent I (Remedial Teacher)

*"The root cause of student absenteeism is related to the role of parents at home. Some parents do not prioritize their children's education at home. For example, some students often do not complete their homework when they come to school after the weekend. When asked whether their parents check their exercise books and homework, the students answer that they do not. Additionally, the home environment also affects students' absenteeism at school. As we know, many of these students live in longhouses. When one family observes that other families are not sending their children to school, they are also reluctant to send their children because they see it as a common and acceptable practice, since others are also not sending their children to school. Thus, they do not feel guilty about it. Furthermore, the most common problem here is among families with low income. Due to unstable family socioeconomic conditions and lack of a steady income, parents cannot afford to buy fuel for their boats to send their children to school. Parents have to buy a drum of boat fuel, estimated to cost around RM120 for a round trip, as it takes 3 hours by boat to reach the school from the longhouse. This cost becomes a burden for them. As a result, they face difficulties sending their children to school due to the high transportation costs."*

Respondent J (Data Teacher and Year 5 Class Teacher)

*"Many dropouts are from families that do not care about their children's education. Parents often ignore whether their children go to school or not."*

Respondent K (Year 6 Class Teacher)

*"Dropout issues are linked to socio-economic factors and financial instability. For example, families who have lost jobs or lack a stable income may stop sending their children to school due to financial constraints, compounded by the long distance to the school."*

Respondent L (Teacher at a Primary School in Baram, Sarawak)

From the interviews with respondents, most indicated that the main cause from parents is a lack of awareness about the importance of education for their children. This may be due to parents not having a high level of education, with many having only completed primary school. As a result, they are unaware of the importance of education for their children because they were not exposed to such matters. The educational level of parents also affects student dropout rates. According to Khalid et al. (2018), the majority of low-income parents do not have a high level of education. Consequently, they are not aware of the importance of their children attending school because they themselves were not exposed to this importance.

Additionally, many respondents also mentioned that parental socioeconomic status influences student dropout rates. Most agreed that the cost of sending students to school is high because parents have to buy fuel for their boats every week to send their children to school. Low family income can impact educational development in the country. This leads to children losing interest in continuing their education (Azrul & Noordeyana, 2018). According to data released by the Malaysian Institute for Economic and Democracy (IDEAS) (2017), nearly sixty percent of dropouts come from low-income families, meaning their absence affects their academic performance. Furthermore, parental employment also plays a role in the family's socioeconomic status. Kitha (2021) noted that a large proportion of rural residents focus on primary economic activities, including traditional methods. For example, many parents and guardians in the rural area of Lubok Antu, Sarawak, do not have stable

incomes. They engage in various activities to make a living, such as planting crops, raising chickens and ducks, and fishing. Their income is irregular, and sometimes they do not have any earnings. Consequently, they cannot afford to buy fuel for their boats to send their children to school every two weeks.

It is clear that students lack high educational opportunities due to their weak family socioeconomic conditions, and they do not always have sufficient financial resources. This becomes a constraint for parents/guardians in providing good educational opportunities for their children.

### **Issues and Challenges Related to Teachers**

Issues and challenges related to teachers also impact student dropout rates in schools. Teachers have a significant influence on student retention. They need to strive to engage students and motivate them to attend school, as teachers spend a substantial amount of time with students in the classroom. Below are insights shared by the respondents involved:

*"One of the reasons why student dropout occurs in schools is due to a lack of rapport between teachers and students. Without a strong relationship between teachers and students, a good rapport cannot be established. Consequently, the learning process will not be effective."*

Respondent B (Islamic Education Teacher and Year 2 Class Teacher)

*"A lack of engaging teaching methods is one of the contributors to student dropout in schools. Students become bored with outdated and monotonous teaching methods."*

Respondent I (Remedial Teacher)

From the insights shared by the respondents, it can be concluded that the teaching style of teachers plays a crucial role in influencing student dropout rates. Unengaging teaching methods make students less interested and less focused in class. An effective teacher is one who can captivate students by using teaching methods and techniques that cater to their needs and learning styles. Teachers who continue to use traditional teaching methods may cause students to lose focus, eventually leading to dropout.

### **Issues and Challenges Related to School Management/Administrators/Infrastructure**

School management and administrators also play a critical role in addressing the issue of student dropout. School management must consider students' welfare and prioritize their needs. Administrators should also work to maintain good student attendance. Below are insights shared by the respondents involved:

*"One of the reasons for student dropout in schools is the lack of proper infrastructure, such as well-maintained classrooms. From my observations, some classrooms have broken cement floors, dirty and unpainted walls, and insufficient lighting and fans, making it uncomfortable for students to learn. Many rural schools still rely on generators for electricity, leading to frequent power outages due to generator malfunctions or fuel depletion. There have been instances where schools have been without electricity for a week. Students and teachers had to endure the heat in classrooms and dormitories during the day and darkness at night."*

Respondent B (Islamic Education Teacher and Year 2 Class Teacher)

*"Schools lack teaching aids, particularly for subjects like Science, Art Education, and Design and Technology (RBT). Teachers are unable to implement creative and diverse teaching methods due to the shortage of teaching materials. Some teachers even have to use their own money to purchase teaching aids. I am impressed by their efforts, but how long should teachers have to use their own funds to buy these materials? Even though there is an annual Equipment Provision Allocation, it is insufficient for purchasing the necessary teaching aids."*

Respondent E (Acting Assistant Principal for Student Affairs)

*"The effectiveness of regular follow-up towards positive change from the school is still lacking. Frequent changes in school principals and administrators also contribute to the ineffectiveness in addressing student dropout issues."*

Respondent H (Assistant Principal of Co-curricular Affairs)

*"School discipline management affects student attendance. Dropout occurs when students frequently miss school. One reason students avoid school related to discipline management is issues like bullying, theft, and fighting. Students fear going to school because they are afraid of being bullied by peers. Therefore, schools and administrators must address discipline problems seriously and take substantial steps to prevent these issues."*

Respondent I (Remedial Teacher)

The interviews reveal that school infrastructure and discipline management play significant roles in mitigating student dropout. The lack of teaching aids prevents teachers from employing diverse and engaging teaching methods. Additionally, systematic and orderly school discipline management can help reduce dropout rates. Schools should ensure a safe and conducive environment, free from negative issues such as bullying and smoking.

### **Issues and Challenges Related to Students**

One of the causes of student dropout in schools stems from the students themselves. Students must take responsibility for their education and work to prevent dropout from occurring. They need to be aware of the consequences and impact on their future if they drop out of school. This is because some students prefer staying at home and playing on their phones rather than attending school. Addressing this issue from an early stage is crucial to prevent it from developing into a serious problem in the future. Below are insights shared by the respondents involved:

*"One of the reasons for student dropout in schools is that students lack interest in learning."*

Respondent A (Dormitory Management Assistant)

*"Students' lack of motivation to attend school is one of the causes of dropout."*

Respondent B (Islamic Education Teacher and Year 2 Class Teacher)

*"From my observation, students lack awareness about the importance of education and have no motivation to learn. As a result, they are unwilling to go to school."*

Respondent C (Year 4 Class Teacher)

*"There are still preschool students who do not want to attend preschool even though they are of age. They prefer staying at home where they can wake up late and play with their parents' phones as much as they want, unlike in school where they need to wake up early."*

Respondent D (Preschool Management Assistant)

*"A lack of competitiveness among students contributes to dropout. There is a significant gap between students in the class, and they appear unfocused. I suspect this might be due to the abolition of UPSR (Primary School Achievement Test). Since the removal of UPSR, students seem to place less importance on their studies because there is no UPSR exam."*

Respondent E (Acting Assistant Principal for Student Affairs)

*"Distance from school is one reason why preschool students do not attend. Students also lack independence and start crying when their parents leave them at preschool. As a result, parents often have to take their children home to prevent disruptions to teaching."*

Respondent G (Preschool Teacher)

*"Students are more interested in working at an early age because it seems like a faster way to earn money compared to the long-term investment of education. I have been teaching in this district for over 15 years and often see students who have completed Year 6 working in coffee shops in town. It appears they do not continue their education to secondary levels. I am quite disappointed to see my former students working in these establishments."*

Respondent H (Assistant Principal of Co-curricular Affairs)

*"Students are afraid of being bullied, which deters them from going to school. Students in upper levels often bully younger students."*

Respondent I (Remedial Teacher)

*"Students lacking complete documentation for school registration (e.g., parents without identification documents or students without identification documents like identity cards or birth certificates) contribute to dropout rates. Schools and school clerks have made efforts to help and advise parents or guardians to manage the necessary documents, but unfortunately, there seems to be a lack of effort from parents and guardians to handle these issues."*

Respondent K (Year 6 Class Teacher)

*"One cause of dropout among pupils is their lack of interest or loss of interest in attending school. They often find school boring and dislike the amount of homework and tasks. Additionally, pupils with emotional issues—such as family problems, social problems at school, low self-esteem, and bullying—are at risk of dropping out. Bullying particularly affects students' willingness to attend school due to safety concerns, leading to demotivation. Pupils with family responsibilities, such as caring for sick or disabled family members, or those with health issues requiring medical attention, are also prone to dropout."*

Respondent L (Teacher at a Primary School in Baram, Sarawak)

*"Students are unmotivated to go to school due to the Covid-19 pandemic that has affected Malaysia. Because of the pandemic, schools were ordered to close for 2 years under the Movement Control Order (MCO). Schools were closed for 2 years, and teaching sessions were conducted through home-based learning (PdPR). As a result, most students have become*

*accustomed to staying at home for 2 years without attending school. Additionally, another reason students are unmotivated to go to school is the absence of centralized exams like UPSR. Previously, before the UPSR exams were abolished, both teachers and students were very motivated to achieve good academic results because they had a goal to reach, which was to obtain the best results in the UPSR. Schools also seemed more focused on academic aspects because school performance was based on UPSR exam excellence. In comparison to the current education system, there are no longer centralized exams in primary schools after the UPSR exams were abolished. The Classroom Assessment (PBD) method does not seem to have a significant impact on the academic aspects of schools. Students seem to lose direction in their learning because there is no goal to achieve. There is no competition among students, teachers, or schools. Students feel it does not matter if they achieve Level 1 or Level 2 in their PBD because they consider it as part of the learning process and holistic assessment. The implication is that they do not study diligently because they know they will not be compared with other students, and teachers will not scold them if they do not achieve a good level of mastery. The third reason for student dropout issues is that students live with their grandparents. In my school, most students do not live with their parents. Instead, they live with their grandparents in longhouses because their parents work in the city. Parents only return to the village during school holidays. When these students live with their grandparents, the grandparents tend to comply with and fulfill any wish of their beloved grandchildren. For example, if these students do not want to go to school, their grandparents will not scold them; instead, they will just follow the wishes of their grandchildren."*

Respondent N (Teacher at a school in rural Sri Aman, Sarawak)

From all the respondents, the main issue concerning students is motivation to attend school. Motivation can be linked to a person's desire to engage in or avoid something continuously (Nuradibah & Hazlina, 2016). Motivation plays a crucial role in the learning process as it determines the direction and effectiveness of learning. One respondent mentioned that students are increasingly interested in working at a young age, as early as 13, to support themselves and their families. One reason for wanting to work early is to buy personal items such as mobile phones and data plans to keep up with digital trends and social media platforms like Facebook and TikTok. These students are often seen working in eateries and retail shops.

The most significant factor influencing an individual's access to ideal education is the individual themselves. Students' perspectives, interests, and motivation greatly affect school dropout rates. Attitude has a considerable impact on the speed at which students learn and their ability to master educational content. If students have a positive attitude, such as recognizing the importance of learning, they will strive to study diligently. Conversely, a negative attitude disrupts the learning process and can lead to dropout.

For example, children of the same age living in urban areas are said to have different personalities from Indigenous children. According to a study by Azizah et al. (2018), Indigenous students are shy, somewhat sensitive, and have difficulty accepting outsiders, resulting in passive behavior in class. Alia and Norwaliza (2021) noted that the shyness of Indigenous students slows down the learning process due to weak interaction and communication, making it difficult for them to progress academically. As a result, the learning process becomes slow, and teachers struggle to gauge students' understanding.

Another contributing factor to academic dropout is a decrease in students' interest in subjects. According to the Fourth Edition Dewan Dictionary (2017), interest is defined as a desire (liking, tendency) for something. Interest in learning is a crucial psychological component that significantly influences the learning process, development, and success of students (Zaenol et al. 2021). Rusmiati (2017) suggests that interest greatly impacts learning; if educational materials do not engage students, they will not learn effectively due to a lack of appeal.

Additionally, peer influence is a significant factor contributing to academic dropout. Peers are the individuals closest to students and spend a lot of time with them both in and out of school. Peers who sit next to students can motivate them to stay focused on lessons taught by teachers. Alia and Norwaliza (2021) found that students who frequently sleep in class can influence their peers to do the same. Studies have shown that urban poverty significantly affects children's academic development, leading to educational dropout (Shaharom & Ghani 2019). Financial constraints act as a barrier to students' ability to pursue education.

Furthermore, one respondent mentioned that a lack of proper documentation is a cause of student dropout. Individuals need documentation to prove their identity within the country (Siti Nur Aaisyah 2019). To attend school, students must have complete identification documents such as identity cards and birth certificates. Schools cannot accept students without proper identification, as it complicates matters if these students encounter issues or accidents at school.

### **Strategies / Recommendations for Addressing Issues (Based On Literature)**

#### ***Strategies/Recommendations for Addressing Issues Related to Parents (Based on Literature)***

To address issues related to student dropouts concerning parents and guardians, one strategy is for schools to implement a "**Caring Visit Program**" to longhouses. Schools can visit parents/guardians or the students themselves. The purpose of this Caring Visit Program is to meet and listen to the issues faced by these families and then collaboratively find solutions to mitigate student dropouts. One initiative that could arise from this Caring Visit is seeking assistance from the government or relevant organizations to cover the high transportation costs for families sending students to school. Schools can present these issues to the authorities.

Additionally, the Caring Visit aims to guide parents and raise awareness among guardians about the importance of education for the future of their children/relatives/grandchildren through Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) programs and fostering a closer relationship with the community. Parents/guardians should be introduced early to the significance of preschool education. Students need early exposure from home. Schools should also encourage parents/guardians to teach their children to recognize letters and numbers at home rather than relying solely on school teachers. Parents need to be attentive to their children's education and concerned about their development.

Moreover, the Malaysian Ministry of Education (KPM) (2019) has provided various forms of assistance through schools, including free textbooks, student milk programs,

additional food programs (RMT), as well as counseling services and remedial teachers to enhance students' motivation to continue learning. The assistance provided by the ministry can help alleviate some of the financial burdens of parents concerning their children's education.

*Strategies/Recommendations for Addressing Issues Related to Teachers (Based on Literature)*

One of the proposed strategies for addressing issues related to teachers is for them to diversify their teaching techniques. One activity that teachers at boarding schools can implement is incorporating television watching during students' free time, especially in the afternoon or evening, in addition to regular study activities. This can increase students' interest in staying at the hostel. Additionally, teachers can create play areas with indoor games like carrom, scrabble, and others to engage students. Educational field trips are also necessary to expose students to the outside world, as students living in rural areas may not be exposed to advancements as those in urban areas due to their remote location.

The hostel warden and the school's Assistant Principal of Student Affairs should also plan activities that can attract students to stay in the hostel. This is because students will feel more engaged if they are involved in various activities, especially physical ones like games and sports. One of the ways teachers can engage their students during teaching and learning is by using enjoyable teaching methods. To spark students' interest in mastering the subjects being taught, teachers need to use a variety of methods and approaches. Optimistic teachers can create learning opportunities by considering different learning styles. Teachers can also incorporate games into lessons to make the learning process less monotonous. Teachers might design projects involving students to give them goals for coming to school. Once the project is completed, students should present the materials or methods used and the purpose of the project. Teachers should increase after-class activities to enhance student interaction.

*Strategies/Recommendations for Addressing Issues Related to School Management / Administration / Infrastructure (Based on Literature)*

One role that schools can play is inviting external motivational speakers to give talks to students about the negative effects of truancy and absenteeism. The aim of these motivational talks is to boost student motivation. One possible topic for such talks is the responsibility of parents in helping teachers encourage students to attend school and the importance of education for children. According to Nuradibah and Hazlina (2016), motivated students usually have a strong desire to maintain interest in what is taught, including obtaining the best education. This is due to encouragement and stimulation from their surroundings. Frequent incentives for learning, such as grades, money, praise, awards, and so on, will engage students in their studies. Additionally, a person's drive to act to achieve something, even over a long period, is also a source of motivation. Therefore, students with different interests and tendencies need support to ignite their interest in learning. To reduce dropout rates, the Malaysian Ministry of Education (KPM) (2019) has also collaborated with various parties to launch educational programs.

Furthermore, schools should create a more conducive and comfortable infrastructure to attract students' interest in learning. Schools can request special allocations from the Parent-Teacher Association (PIBG) to decorate classrooms. They can also apply for ICT equipment to aid in integrating ICT elements into teaching and learning, and request stable

internet connections to help students become familiar with ICT and keep up with globalization. Additionally, schools could establish a Loving Teacher Program where each teacher is assigned a few students as “adopted” children in school. The role of the teacher is to guide and be a point of contact if the students under their care face any issues.

#### *Strategies/Recommendations for Addressing Issues Related to Students (Based on Literature)*

One initiative by schools to encourage students to attend school is by offering rewards and motivation to keep them enthusiastic about going to school. Rewards can include incentives, hampers, or certificates of appreciation. Nominate an exemplary student each week to inspire other students to do their best, as all students enjoy being praised. Additionally, for boarding schools, the school should allow students who live far away to stay in the hostel. Schools should conduct surveys or registration projections for Year 1 or preschool and regularly identify children in longhouses. Schools must emphasize the importance of education for future life through community activities or Parent-Teacher Associations (PTA) and expose students to job opportunities or skills, especially after exam results are announced. To assist students without documentation, one initiative schools can undertake is to simplify the student registration process. Schools should work to help parents/guardians with the registration process.

Students with issues and those at risk of dropping out should be identified. Schools should make efforts to support students, particularly those from poor backgrounds. The school should discuss with the PTA about ways to provide financial aid to ease the burden on these students. Schools should also identify students with potential for academic excellence and assist them in obtaining scholarships to pursue higher education. Schools should monitor students at risk of dropping out and maintain regular contact with guardians, especially if the student is absent from school.

#### **Implications**

##### *Implications for Parents*

Children become uncivilized as they grow up due to imperfect family institutions and a lack of knowledge (Rahimah & Siti Sa'adah 2017). This is because neglected students lack a balanced way to assess their parents' and family's roles in their lives, leading to disrespect towards their parents. If this attitude persists into adulthood, it becomes concerning. As parents age, the situation becomes more difficult. Children may disregard their parents' frailty and even burden them with issues like drug abuse, causing embarrassment (Rozmi, Nor Azri, Fauziah, Salina 2017). Parents will need to learn how to handle the stress and emotions that arise from their children's uncivilized behavior indirectly.

Furthermore, this perspective will not improve family conditions because children are expected to change their parents' lives and status, potentially breaking the cycle of poverty. However, given this situation, it is nearly impossible for these children to alter their family's fate.

Moreover, it is undeniable that education has the power to enhance children's quality of life, helping them become active individuals with strong values in appreciating their parents. Clearly, parents' lives are significantly impacted if their children do not attend school. Students should go to school to equip themselves with knowledge and skills to compete in

this globalized era and avoid social issues that could negatively affect themselves and their families.

### **Implications for Teachers**

One of the most significant implications of students falling behind is that teachers' instructional objectives will not be achieved. This is because all students need to master the basics of reading, writing, and arithmetic in class before the teacher's objectives can be met. A teacher's performance in school will also be affected if these lagging students still struggle with writing, reading, and counting. For example, at the school where I teach, there are students who have been absent for months. When they eventually return, it is often just to sit for classroom assessments. They will undoubtedly struggle to meet the required proficiency levels. This affects not only the students' performance but also the performance of the teacher who instructs them.

A notable effect on students is that they become uneducated, lack knowledge, and most unfortunately, they become illiterate. In the future, these lagging students will face significant challenges. A person who cannot read and write is referred to as illiterate. They fall far behind their peers due to this lack of education. They have no other means to express their interests without early education, so they struggle to understand and articulate their interests. Additionally, education shapes an individual's identity and principles. This situation has a profound impact on homeless children and those who are forced to fall behind in their education. They are unaware and illiterate. Even more sadly, without knowledge, they have limited options to improve their lives.

Furthermore, being illiterate leads to a loss of self-confidence because they cannot understand what others are saying. Illiteracy also causes them to neglect modern technology such as the Internet and social media due to their condition. This is the reality for these homeless children. Their lives are filled with failure, and they remain trapped in lower economic categories.

### **Implications for Schools and Administrators**

The implications of educational disruption for schools and administrators are profound and negatively impact school management. One consequence is that student dropout disrupts school attendance performance. The District Education Office (PPD) reviews student attendance monthly, and schools with unsatisfactory attendance are required to implement interventions or find solutions to address the issue. This creates an additional problem where schools must spend time developing and planning these interventions, increasing the workload for teachers and administrators.

As a result, schools may not produce as many successful students. Students who do not attend school miss out on formal education, which is crucial for achieving career goals (Siti Nur Aaisyah 2019). There is high hope that education can transform their family's life. Growing up without formal education makes life more challenging, as most jobs now require academic qualifications and certificates. Without education, students face uncertain career paths and lack the academic credentials needed for professional fields such as medicine, law, accounting, and teaching. Consequently, they may end up working in traditional roles like farming or fishing.

### **Implications for Students**

The impact of disruptions in education significantly affects students' life trajectories over the long term. As we know, children are a crucial asset to the nation. Providing a safe and suitable environment is the best way to develop this human capital. The Child Act 2001 defines a child as anyone under the age of 18 and requires protection to prevent and respond to neglect, abuse, violence, and exploitation (Alias, Harlida, Yusramizza, Ain 2018). For these children, life might seem more enjoyable when they are not in school. They are unaware of the long-term effects on themselves as they grow older. They will surely regret it once they reach adulthood, and by then, time and opportunities cannot be reclaimed.

Additionally, due to a lack of necessary tools for remote learning, illiteracy rates increased significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic (Hamid 2021). This issue was also discussed when students in remote areas failed to obtain the technological tools needed for learning. The educational landscape of the country has changed since the COVID-19 pandemic. More education is now conducted through the internet and technology. Children in these remote areas lack access to education due to the absence of technology. This situation ultimately causes them to fall significantly behind.

This not only results in students in remote areas losing interest in education but also diminishes their level of technological knowledge. They become less interested in subjects or topics because they do not attend classes. Interest in a subject often stems from a good understanding of it. Furthermore, students who do not grasp the lesson may leave the class and disregard the importance of the subject.

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

Future research should examine the impact of educational neglect on both society and the nation. Understanding how educational neglect affects human capital development is crucial for building a progressive nation. Additionally, investigating the economic growth implications of educational neglect could provide insights into broader societal impacts. Research focusing on gender-specific educational neglect could reveal overlooked disparities, highlighting the need for targeted interventions in these populations.

### **Conclusion**

Our education system is evolving towards approaches better aligned with local needs. This shift impacts all educational levels, from primary and secondary schools to higher institutions, reflecting the demands of globalization. However, educational gaps caused by neglect persist and will only narrow as basic needs are met. Therefore, the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE) must conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the current education system to advance the sector further. It is crucial for the youth to be well-rounded in cognitive, physical, mental, and emotional aspects, particularly in technology and economics, for national progress.

To implement effective strategies, it is essential to identify barriers hindering the development of viable human capital. The Malaysian Education Development Plan 2013–2025 aims to ensure that all schools and students have equal opportunities to excel in both curriculum and co-curricular activities. The MOE is committed to strengthening the education sector. To bridge the educational gap, continuous effort and commitment from all

stakeholders—including education executives, parents, NGOs, community groups, and investors—are vital. Every educator must pay significant attention to student teaching and facilitation processes, as well as students' welfare and social needs, especially in rural areas.

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