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### The Beauty and the Beast of Rural Education Development in Northern Malaysia

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#### Abstract

Education will lead to the economic growth, stability of social and political system, able to reduce crime rates and at the same time will improve social services. Education is very important for rural folks especially among young people in improving their standard of living. Poor and lack of education will spoil all other effort towards rural development. When rural people schooling, it will open a lot of opportunities for them in exploring the wider world. Education contribute in developing appropriate skills among the communities and individuals in facing the challenges in their life. Both formal and non-formal education are important in giving an opportunity to the people to excel in their life. Formal education is said to be a foundation in developing some skills while non-formal education more advantageous in some situation. The purpose of this study is to identify the improvement and the pitfall of education development in rural area in Northern Malaysia especially in Kedah, Malaysia. Mix methods were applied where 240 households from selected rural village answered a questionnaire distributed to them and another thirteen (13) headman and six (6) development managers were interviewed for the data collection. Mean value was used in explaining the finding for the quantitative method while Hermeneutic Analysis was used for the qualitative method. The findings discussed on the improvement as well as pitfalls of education development in rural area.

**Key words:** education, education development, rural, rural community, community development

#### Introduction

Education Development is well known as one of the tools to fighting poverty in rural areas. Education will lead to the economic growth, stability of social and political system, able to reduce crime rates and at the same time will improve social services. Poverty itself sometimes force parents or families to not encourage their children to keep schooling but to go to work to support the family. Ensuring children schooling is very important in globalization era, not only to the children but also to the community and the nation as well. Improvement in education facilities, opportunities and achievement for the rural people need to be seriously taken care by the authorize agencies.

#### Education Development in Rural Area

In the context of rural development, quality of life becomes one of the important elements (Kazana et al., 2006; Kazana & Kazaklis, 2009; Wismer, 1999). Measuring quality of life at local level is one of the most interesting tasks in the quest of finding the relationship between sustainable

development and well-being of the people (Gasper, 2005; McAllister, 2005; Veenhoven, 2002). However, people often get confused between quality of life and standard of living. Quality of life more towards people perceive either satisfied or dissatisfied with their life in different level while standard of living more toward either they met or not the level of human needs (Costanza et al., 2007; McAllister, 2005).

There are two basic approaches for evaluating the quality of life; the first method is by using quantifiable socioeconomic indicators such as education, population, health, income per capita, and infrastructure development, social and political stability. This approach also known as objective approach (Deller, Tsai, Marcouiller, English, 2001; Kowaltowski, Gomes da Silva, Pina, Labaki, Ruschel, Carvalho Moreira, 2006; Krutilla & Reuveny, 2002). The second method is by using subjective approach or also known as subjective well-being (Costanza et al., 2007; Marans, 2003; Zidansek, 2007). Subjective approach more towards assessment of life as a whole, to what extent the person perceived his need being met and his overall quality of life.

Poole, Alvarez, Penagos, and Vazquez (2013) stressed out that education is very important for rural folks especially among young people in improving their standard of living. Back in 1991, Browne and Barret already point out that poor and lack of education will spoil all other effort towards rural development efforts (Browne & Barrett, 1991). When rural people schooling, it will open a lot of opportunities for them in exploring the wider world. Poole et al. (2013) further claimed that education contribute in developing appropriate skills among the communities and individuals in facing the challenges in their life. Both formal and non-formal education are important in giving an opportunity to the people to excel in their life. Formal education is said to be a foundation in developing some skills while non-formal education more advantageous in some situation.

Winters and Chiodi (2011) in their study in rural Mexico, points out that for the last decade, employability of young people increase when their level of education increase. They further claimed that education is a key to get out from the rural poverty. Hence, education development is very important for the rural people especially for the young people. Poole et al. (2013) agreed with Winters and Chiodi. They further added that education programs must “re-skilling” youngsters in exploiting and adventure new opportunities and at the same time able to overcome obstacles in local development. For that reason, the education system needs to well blended both theoretical and practical as well as technical skills for the young blood to take part actively in the rural development.

In assessing the impact of education toward rural people, Flores-Crespo’s (2007) emphasis that, besides in the classroom, it must also be done beyond the classroom. The assessment needs to relate with the complexity of economic, environmental, and social settings. This will open an opportunity and stimulating aspirations, social cohesion and fostering citizenship for youngsters (World Bank, 2009a, b). Muyeed (1982) reported that besides formal education, non-formal education also needs to be taken seriously for rural people for their learning needs as most of the rural people comfortable to it.

Marinas (2015) added that for the development in rural areas to successfully took place, human capital aspect need to be considered seriously by the government or authorized parties. Earlier, Krugman (1991) and Gennaioli, La Porta, Lopez-de-Silanes and Sheifer (2013), also mentioned that education development is one of the important elements in rural development programs. They further highlighted that;

*“The human capital of rural areas consists of available skills, competences and education of the labor force and represents a key driver for development since it contributes to regional knowledge base and supports innovation processes, entrepreneurship and productivity, the availability of skilled and educated labor force in rural areas could generate increasing income and economic growth”.*

Hence, investments in human capital and education development can be said as among the key drivers for promoting rural development (Aceleanu, Molanescu, Graciun & Voicu, 2013; Fratesi & Peruca, 2014). In supporting the investment in education development especially in rural area, UNICEF (2014) among other makes the point that;

*“Investment in the education and training of the labor force is considered to have high private and public returns on investments. Better education creates prerequisites for better jobs and higher salaries (private returns on investments), while better educated labor force enjoys the capacity to develop more complex tasks and to increase productivity with positive effects on economic growth (public returns of investment). The higher the education, and consequently the quality of human capital, the larger the positive impact on economic development, in particular on GDP increase”.*

Back in 1966, Marc Blaug already suggested that to improve the economy and quality of life of rural people, good literacy rates are one of the push factors that need to seriously take care by the authorized parties (Blaug, 1966; Dent, 2007). Realizing the important contribution of education in the development of rural area in Malaysia, Malaysian government through Tenth and Eleven Malaysia Plan (10<sup>th</sup> MP and 11<sup>th</sup> MP) focuses more in increasing the living standards of the bottom 40% households (B40) by providing more education opportunities to the rural people in upgrading their skills, more industrial attachment as well as other assistance related to education development in rural area. With this phenomenon, this study was conducted to investigate the reality of the implementation and acceptance of rural education development efforts towards rural population.

## Methodology

This study covered the state at northern region of Peninsular Malaysia, focusing on Kedah, which is among the state that recorded high incidence of poverty as per record by Department of Statistic Malaysia 2013. Rural villages under Kedah Regional Development Authority (KEDA) were selected for this study. Mix methods were applied where 240 households from selected rural village answered a questionnaire distributed to them and another thirteen (13) headman and six (6) development managers were interviewed for the data collection. For interviews, permission to record was obtained from respondents before the interview took place. Respondents from both groups were asked regarding education development in rural area, such as literacy rate, level of education, drop-out rate, adult basic education, training and skill development and access to education and training. Mean value was used in explaining the finding for the quantitative method while Hermeneutic Analysis was used for the qualitative method.

## Results

In this study, out of 240 respondents, 172 are males while the remaining 68 are females. Half of the respondents are at the age of 61 years old and above. As for the education level, half of the respondents (50%) able to complete their primary school while forty seven percent (47%) of them managed to complete their formal education up to secondary school. As for qualitative study, out of 19 respondents, male respondents turned to be the majority (17 respondents) while only two (2) respondents is female respondent. All the respondents holding their respective position for at least five years and the longest is 28 years.

Respondent (Headman)	Years in the Position	Respondent (Headman)	Years in the Position	Respondent (Development Manager)	Years in the Position
KMY1	28	ZS1	18	MG1	10
KMY2	6	ZS2	17	MG2	8
KMY3	8	ZS3	10	MG3	5

KMY4	5	ZS4	12	MG4	26
KMY5	13	ZS5	7	MG5	27
KMY6	5	ZS6	5	MG6	10
KMY7	13				

Education is well known as one of the powerful tools in fighting poverty especially in rural area. As per Marinas (2015) suggestion, the development of human capital and education need to be considered seriously by the government or authorized parties if they want to succeed in developing rural area. Hence, this research objective aligns with the above suggestion. For that purpose, respondents were asked on the education development at their respective area. They were asked on the matter related to education development and four different scale were given to them as their choices of answer (1= Strongly Disagree; 2= Disagree; 3= Agree; 4= Strongly Agree).

The finding on the education development in rural area Kedah indicated that basically respondents agreed that the literacy rate among rural people is improving compared to previous day before they involve in the rural community development. This happen due to frequent and continuous effort taken by Kedah Regional Development Authority (KEDA) and related agencies in encouraging rural people to enhance their education level be it formal or non-formal as a tool for them to improvise their standard of living and get out from poverty. The mean value of 2.97 for the statement of “My family and I are more concerned about our children’s education after being involved with KEDA compared to before being involved with KEDA”, aligns with the feedback from respondents.

A lot of facilities, assistance and opportunities in education for rural people are given by Kedah Regional Development Authority (KEDA) and the related authorities in helping this group of people and this was agreed by the respondents when researcher asked them. The statement of “My family and I enjoy more educational facilities after being involved with KEDA compared to before being involved with KEDA” (mean value of 3.03), follow by the statement of “My family and I enjoy more educational assistance after being involved with KEDA compared to before being involved with KEDA” with mean value of 3.10 and the third statement of “My family and I enjoy better educational opportunities after being involved with KEDA compared to before being involved with KEDA” with mean value of 3.11 support their feedback in this matter.

Respondents also agreed that the level of education among their children become better compared to previous situation. Previously, less children in rural area finished their secondary level. The most only up to standard six in primary school. However, with all sort of programs under rural community development, the achievement is better. Majority of them able to finish at least up to form five (SPM) at secondary level. Some of them even pursue their study to higher level. This statement is translated by the question “My family and I enjoy better opportunities to further our education to a higher level after being involved with KEDA compared to before being involved with KEDA” with mean value of 3.08 and the statement of “My children are academically superior after being involved with KEDA compared to before being involved with KEDA” with mean value of 2.89.

Education development in this study also refers to academic and non-academic. This is to align with Tenth Malaysia Plan (10<sup>th</sup> MP) and Eleven Malaysia Plan (11<sup>th</sup> MP) where the government focuses on increasing the living standard of bottom 40% household (B40) by providing more access to education opportunities to people in this group to boost their education and skill attainment. The statement of “Learning opportunities in non-academic fields, such as skills and technical fields are better after being involved with KEDA compared to before being involved with KEDA” (mean value of 3.07) supported the plan.

Besides distributed questionnaires to household in rural area regarding this matter, researcher also interviewed thirteen (13) Headmen and six (6) Development Managers regarding education development in rural area Kedah.

When discussing on drop-out rate among students in rural area, KMY1, KMY2, KMY3, KMY4, KMY5, ZS1, ZS3, ZS5 and ZS6 stated that basically the rate is decreasing with current situation

between ten to twenty percent only (10-20%). More and more rural students further their study to the higher level. This is a good signal since education is very important in improving standard of living (Krugman, 1991; Gennaioli, La Porta, Lopez-de-Silanes & Sheifer, 2013; Poole, Alvarez, Penagos & Vazquez, 2013).

Response from KMY1 indicated that there are about 20 students from his village further study at tertiary level locally and eight (8) more at overseas. KMY2 claimed that as much as 50% of students from his village studied up to university level and there is one who now become a cardiologist. For KMY3, diploma level is the highest qualification obtained by the students residing in his village while majority of them able to finish their form three (PMR/PT3). KMY4 and KMY6 claimed that majority of students in their village able to finish the study up to form five (SPM) and form six (STPM). ZS1, ZS2, ZS3, ZS4, ZS5 and ZS6 claimed that most of the students in their village able to finish form three and form five (SPM). It is about 10 to 20 percent further their study at tertiary level or skill training institute.

On drop-out issue, when researcher asked further, below are some of the response from Headman;

Interview excerpt: ZS1

*“... the distance between the school and our housing area was not far away but there were still students dropping out of school. When it comes to studying, the parents of the student never even care whether their children go to school or not...”*

Interview excerpt: ZS3

*“There are among those who do not want to continue their studies because they are more interested in finding work to help their hard-working families. But when it comes to a young age, how much income can be earned to help families. It is better to learn whether academic or skill that can give them the opportunity to earn a better income in the future”.*

Of the responses given by some headman, it is arguable that these drop-out students are not their will but because of the inevitable reasons and limitations of life have also arisen to this problem. Even though the percentage is small but special attention need to be taken in attending this matter by the parents, teacher, headman, and related government agencies. As what Browne and Barrett (1991) claimed, poor and lack of education will spoil all other effort towards rural development efforts, so this matter need to handle with good care.

Discussing on adult basic education, MG2 has stated that many courses for adults have been set, be it formal or non-formal education. As for example, the Prosperous Family Development Course, Parent Motivation Course, Balanced Food Supply Course, Human Mind Development Program, Entrepreneurship Skills Course, Village Industrial Training Program, Agriculture and Livestock Program, Service Program and more. All these courses and programs are to ensure that rural adults are not left behind in getting knowledge for a better life. This is acknowledged by all Headman who have been interviewed by researcher. It is up to the rural people to join or not. This finding supports the work of Winters and Chiodi (2011) where they claimed education is a key to get out from the rural poverty. It also aligns with Muyeed (1982) works that reported, besides formal education, non-formal education also needs to be taken seriously for rural people for their learning needs as most of the rural people comfortable to it.

MG3, MG4, MG5 and MG6 informed that some of the rural people cannot participate in the program, not because they are not interested but they are forced to find a living for their families. If they attend the program or the course, they have a loss of income for the day. According to MG2, MG3 and MG6, to involve them in the relevant programs and courses, an allowance of RM20 per head per day is provided to them. This is because if they attend a program or course, they will not be able to work on



that day and consequently no income for the day. In addition, according to MG3, for those who did not want to attend, the compulsory presence had to be imposed on them to qualify them for further assistance. Otherwise, they would remain with the old attitude of those who did not want to change.

On training and skill development, MG1 and MG2 stated that KEDA provide a lot of vocational skills courses to rural people to get them out of poverty and generate better income from before. Among the courses offered are Electrical Technology, Welding Technology, Motorcycle Technology, Fabric Technology, Food Technology and Cooling Technology. These courses are given the Certificate of Skill and are recognized by the Department of Skills Development (Jabatan Pembangunan Kemahiran or JPK) and the Energy Commission. These courses have benefited more than 4,258 people out of town. Additionally, the agency has also sought and provided a suitable practical training place for each participant before they are awarded the certificate of completion of the training. This practice is very good because in assessing the impact of training and skill development, both classroom and beyond classroom need to be done. What was done is aligns with works from Flores-Crespo (2007) and Poole et al. (2013).

MG5 further added that agreements have been made between KEDA and the employer where the company, which participants undertake industrial training, need to train and provide employment opportunities to trainees. Besides vocational skills courses, KEDA also provide short courses to rural people such as short-term courses for Community Development, Entrepreneur Development, Student Development, Agro-Technical Development, Information Technology Development and Professionalism Improvement (MG2, MG3, MG4 and MG5).

KMY1, KMY2, KMY4, KMY5, ZS1, ZS4, ZS5 and ZS6 did mentioned that a lot of programs were done by government agencies and public universities to motivate the students at rural area to pursue their study be it academic and non-academic. State Assemblyman, NGOs and students at public universities also hold free tuition classes to students who will sit on important exams such as UPSR, PT3 and SPM. But it's sad because there are still students who do not participate. Many reasons are given when asked but one of them is the attitude of students and parents.

When asked on the improvement of education development in their respective area following the programs and assistance under rural community development in Kedah, researcher obtained a various answer from the headman. KMY7, ZS2, ZS3 stated 50 percent; ZS5 said 60 percent; ZS4 claimed 65 percent; KMY1, KMY2, KMY5, KMY6 and ZS1 stated 70 percent; ZS6 stated 80 percent; KMY4 said 85 percent and the highest improvement was claimed by KMY3, which is 90 percent (Table 1).

Table 1: Percentage of Education Development in rural area in Kedah

Respondent (Headman)	Percentage (%) of Education Development	Respondent (Headman)	Percentage (%) of Education Development	Respondent (Development Manager)	Percentage (%) of Education Development
KMY1	70	ZS1	70	MG1	80
KMY2	70	ZS2	50	MG2	85
KMY3	90	ZS3	50	MG3	80
KMY4	85	ZS4	65	MG4	70
KMY5	70	ZS5	60	MG5	60
KMY6	70	ZS6	80	MG6	80
KMY7	50				

## Conclusion

This study indicates that as overall, rural community development done by Kedah Regional Development Authority (KEDA) and related authorized agencies did contribute to the education development in rural area in Kedah even though the achievement is not hundred percent. This effort needs to continuously perform because time will change the rural people. The good things need patience to be achieved. As one of the key drivers for promoting rural development, KEDA, related government agencies and NGOs in Malaysia, specifically in Kedah need not to surrender in promoting education development and investments in human capital in rural area in Kedah even though the outcomes is not as what expected.

Besides all the efforts, disclosures, assistance and awareness given to them by the KEDA and related government agencies to enhance the education development in rural area, there are still school drop-out cases among children in rural area. The attitude of students and parents was identified as one of the reasons contributed to this case. Some of the parents not even care whether their children go to school or not. Even worse, some of them encourage their kids to find a job instead attending a school. There also a case where the kids themselves willingly stop schooling and work or help their hard-working families to feed their family members.

Generally, the drop-out students are not their will. They are trap between self-interest and family interest. They do realize that the education able to help them to improve their well-being. One side of them, they want to study but the other side, they do not want to burden their family which already have a limitation of life. Even though the percentage is small but special attention need to be taken in attending this matter by the parents, teacher, headman, and related government agencies.

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