

Vocational Education and Skills Training for Indigenous Community in Malaysia

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Abstract

This paper discusses the participation of Indigenous community in the field of Technical and Vocational education (TVE) and in the specialized programs in Skills Training Institutions (STI) in Malaysia. Marginalization of Indigenous youth in terms of education and employment in Malaysia is critical and needs to be addressed. High unemployment among the Orang Asli youth may be attributed to their lack of proper skills required by the employers. Thus, vocational training is needed to ensure the competitiveness of these people in the era of globalization to live a more comfortable life and have a better socio-economic status (SES). This paper also deliberates on the developmental history of TVE, the aims and the objectives of its implementation in the education system. Apart from these, the training and skills programs for the Indigenous youth who are drop-outs and have completed schooling were also discussed. This paper also presents the conclusion and recommendations to improve the participation of Indigenous community in the TVE and STI. If the recommendations are taken positively by the relevant authorities in-charge of the Indigenous people, the future of Indigenous youth will be brighter because it will improve their employment prospects and enhance their social mobility and status.

Keywords: technical and vocational education, skills training, indigenous people, Malaysia

1. Introduction

Stiff competition in the era of globalization has made the technical and vocational education in Malaysia as one of the main agenda of the country to harness its human capital development as stipulated in the nation's Vision 2020 to achieve the status of developed nation by the year 2020. Therefore, in order to achieve the status of a developed nation, there are certain things that need be done. The increase of the number of skilled workers in certain critical fields is deemed necessary. In order to produce technical human resources, more technical institutions and vocational training centers should be open especially for indigenous youth. Vocational education in Malaysia is facing new globalization challenges that requires it adopt new paradigm (Mohamed Rashid, 2002). At present, access to Technical and Vocational Education (TVE) is one of the options for most students, including Indigenous students. In a survey conducted to gauge Indigenous' participation in training and employment, it shows that the involvement of Indigenous students is still at the low level due to lack of exposure on TVE and training among Indigenous communities in Malaysia.

Indigenous communities in Malaysia are still labeled as a society lagging behind the current mainstream development (Ramle, 2006). The dropout rate of Indigenous students is high compared to students of other ethnic groups, especially among male students (Teese et al., 2000). The Department of Orang Asli Development (DOAD) statistics (2008) reported that the dropout cases of Indigenous students in education are still around 30 percent per year in a row in recent years. This may be because they are less interested in academic subjects at school (Ramlee et al., 2009). Although the dropout rate of Indigenous students has dropped from 29 percent in 2011 to 26 percent in 2012 but the Ministry of Rural and Regional Development (MRRD) in collaboration with the Department of Orang Asli Development (DOAD) is still trying to reduce the dropout rates in primary and secondary to 15 percent by year 2015 (The Star, 23rd May 2012) through the programs such as *Mesra Didik* and *Jom ke Sekolah Menengah*.

Although various economic initiatives have been planned and implemented by the government, Indigenous communities are generally still considered as hardcore poor. Therefore, to reduce the poverty stigma among the Indigenous people, TVE should be provided to the Indigenous students so that they could receive appropriate skills trainings that suit their lives. Once they possess vocational skills, it will be easier for them to pursue employment or start their own businesses. But not many Indigenous students are pursuing vocational education offered in the secondary schools. They may have difficulty entering the vocational schools due to their remoteness of their villages from the schools or the training institutions.

Lately, the educational problems of Indigenous children and youth are taken seriously by the government of Malaysia. The government recognizes that to develop the Indigenous community, the first thing to be done is through education (Ramle and Hood Salleh, 2007). However, Basir (2008) pointed out that mostly the Indigenous are not interested in the education provided by the government. A study by Zainal Abidin (2004) shows that only 38.5% received primary education, 10.9% received secondary education and 1.7% received

tertiary education. Dropout rate among Indigenous people is also high (Hasan 1997; Ramle and Hood Salleh, 2007). There are many factors that attributed to the high dropout rate of the Orang Asli children (Ramlee, 2010). According to the study conducted by Ramle and Hood Salleh (2007), most of the Indigenous people do not know how to read, especially adults, while their students did not have the motivation toward education and career.

Low awareness and achievement in education affect the participation rate of Indigenous people in the employment sector. Most of them inherited the traditional economic activities such as hunting and gathering of forest products and small-scale agriculture. Only a few, about 14% of them are engaged in other economic activities such as working in private companies and government departments (Lim, 1997). Following this, the government tries to create a variety of programs to improve the socio-economic status and education of Indigenous communities which is conducted from time to time. This is clearly evident by the existence of a special department called the Department of Indigenous Affairs established in 1953/1954 and now known as the Department of Orang Asli Development (DOAD). This department is placed under the Ministry of Rural and Regional Development. The purpose of this department is to develop the Aboriginal community in accordance with the development of the country (DOAD 2011).

THE INDIGENOUS

The Indigenous are the earliest Native communities that inhabited Malaya. Archaeological studies carried out in several caves in the east and north of the peninsula shows Indigenous ancestors have inhabited the Malay Peninsula since the 8th century BC, which is about 10,000 years ago (Zalizan et al., 2009). The latest number of Indigenous population in Malaysia is about 178,197 (DOAD, 2011). Indigenous community is a minority group which is 0.5 percent of Malaysia's total population. There are three (3) major Indigenous races in Malaysia, the Negritos, Senoi, and Proto-Malay. They are divided into 18 tribes (Nicholas, 2000). They live in 852 villages throughout the Peninsula except in the states of Perlis and Penang. The state of Pahang has the largest population of Indigenous people with 67,506 people (37.9%), followed by Perak 53,299 people (29.9%) and Selangor with 17,587 people (9.9%) (DOAD, 2011). The economic activities of the Indigenous people are based on their traditional food gathering and hunting. They practice a primitive way of life with "enough-for-life" economic orientation and do not involve in a market economy (Ramle, 1993). They engaged in a subsistence economy such as agriculture, hunting, fishing and gathering of forest products for a living. Indigenous poverty rate remains at a high level. It is estimated that almost 80% of the Indigenous population earning below the poverty line (William-Hunts, 1998).

DEVELOPMENT OF TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IN MALAYSIA

Vocational education in Malaysia was introduced by the British in 1897 to train Malay youths as mechanics or fitters to manage the railway lines (Federation of Malaya, 1956; Zakaria, 1988). However, it was not until 1906 when the first public technical school was opened to train technicians for government service that vocational training began to have an impact (Lourdesamy, 1972). In 1926, the first trade school was opened in Kuala Lumpur, marking the beginning of public vocational education in Malaysia (Ministry of Education, 1967). The trade schools offered courses for fitters, electricians, carpenters, brick layers, and tailors. A major change in the vocational education program was in 1965 when the comprehensive education system was introduced. The new system, which raised the school-leaving age to 15 was designed specifically to change the form and content of secondary level education, which would offer a greatly expanded and more diversified range of courses. Students would receive general education with a vocational or technical emphasis on industrial arts (woodwork, metalwork, electricity, and power mechanics), agriculture science, commercial studies, and home science (Kee, 1973; Lourdesamy, 1972; Ministry of Education, 1967; Zakaria, 1988).

Between the years of 1969 to 1974, the government gradually established vocational schools as per the Five-Year Plan of the New Economic Policy in every state across the country. Starting in 1996, the Vocational Secondary Schools (VSS) were upgraded to the Secondary Technical School (STS) in stages. By 2000, there were about 90 STS nationwide. The SVS that were upgraded to STS provides three streams which are technical, vocational and skills. In the 1990s, the demand for technical and vocational schools entry increased. Not only from the weak students but there was a warm welcome from excellent post-Form 3 students as well. Thus, there was an intense competition for an entry into these schools. This is because the awareness of mainstream parents regarding the importance of technical and vocational education in the era of leading toward industrialized nations, coupled with high employment demand. However, the Indigenous students' enrollment in either VSS or STS was very minimal.

According to Abdul Rahman (1986), vocational education includes all vocational programs which the contents of the programs includes the delivery of technical knowledge, the inculcation of moral values or moral development and the provision of skills training in a job field. TVE have a vocational perspective that contains elements such as the skills needed in the areas of employment, entrepreneurship, career, etc. The Australian Ministerial Council of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (2000) have defined vocational

education as a 'general learning that has a vocational perspective. It includes elements such as: generic employability skills, enterprise education, career education and community and work based learning' (p. 21).

In 1996, several changes have occurred in the TVE in Malaysia, including the restructuring of the 69 secondary vocational schools (SVS) to the Secondary Technical School (STS). This means that all SVS were upgraded into STS with three streams: Technical, Vocational, and Skills. In 2012, Vocational Transformation Plan was launched when STS were replaced by Vocational College (KV) not only in name but it also involved a change in curriculum, assessment and certification. Vocational curriculum was reformed comprehensively so as to achieve standards that meet the requirements of the job market and the current market. For a start, 15 SVS has been identified to serve as a pilot program. All students studying at vocational colleges will study for four years, covering 70 percent skills and 30 percent of academic. Students who graduate from this college will receive a Diploma in Vocational Education for the course of eight semesters (four years). Secondary school students from Form One to Form Three who followed the Basic Vocational Program (BVP) will be given a Level Two Skill Certificate. A total of 150 schools will be selected to attend the Basic Vocational programs involving 9,450 students. This transformation involves technical and vocational curriculum, the learning period, the recognition of certification, teaching staff, infrastructure and the most important is the rebranding of STS to the Vocational College. Ministry of Education has rebranded the field of technical and vocational education through the Vocational and Technical Transformation. It is hoped that this major change would attract parents, including Indigenous parents to send their children to Vocational Colleges.

Thus, TVE plays a major role in producing skilled and semi-skilled workers in the development of an industrial country. Through the vocational education system, the Indigenous students will be provided with skills leading to salaried employment. Through skills gained from the TVE, Indigenous students may opt to work or become an entrepreneur after graduating from the skills training institutions. This is because the skills training provided are sufficient to prepare them to become employable or to become entrepreneurs, and indirectly improve their socioeconomic status.

DEFINITION AND OBJECTIVES OF TVE

Vocational education means education that contains elements of skills training and general educational elements such as mathematics, history, religion, morality and so forth. According to Abdul Rahman (1986), vocational education is all the vocational programs of which the contents include delivery of technical knowledge, the inculcation of moral values or moral development and the provision of skills training in a field. In fact, vocational education is a part of the guidance services related to specific career fields as stated by Poole (1978, p.60), "*Career education is job-oriented and ensures that all students leaving the educational system at any level be knowledgeable about available jobs and the skills they demand, and that students possess immediately marketable skills*". Vocational also means the efforts of an organization to produce students who have the knowledge, basic skills and also prepare them to become skilled workers in future (Laugho and Lillis, 1988). In the education system of Malaysia, TVE is separated into two parts, technical education and vocational education.

a. Technical Education

The offer to further studies in the field of technical education is open to students who obtained good results in Lower Secondary Assessment (LSA). The objective of technical education is to prepare students who are prone to technical field in the upper secondary education level to pursue higher education as at the Institute of Higher Learning and abroad. The objective of technical education is to give a balanced academic education and provide basic education in science and technology (Ministry of Education Malaysia 1986:50).

b. Vocational Education

For post-LSA students who obtained moderate or less than satisfactory result in examination, they are offered to pursue learning in vocational schools that offer various skills field that are more *hands-on* oriented. The objective of vocational education is to produce students who are prone to the field of vocational education at upper secondary level. Courses offered enable students to acquire basic vocational knowledge and skills to qualify them to get jobs as skilled or semi-skilled workers in the industry. The syllabus for Vocational schools is different from the syllabus used in ordinary secondary schools. Vocational education focuses more on the practical form of learning based on the courses taken. Only some of the compulsory subjects are the same as the ordinary secondary schools, namely Malay, English, Mathematics, Science, History, Moral Education / Religion, and Health and Physical Education. Students who succeed in MCVE also have the opportunity to pursue a certificate, diploma or degree in higher education institutions locally and abroad.

TRAINING AND SKILLS PROGRAMS FOR EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Traditionally, SVS offered skills training for high school students. There are also skills training programs offer to Indigenous youth. Several types of skills programs available to Indigenous communities to train them to improve their SES through employment that may lead them out of poverty. Among the objectives of the program is to help Indigenous youth to be skilled and later to be employed. There is also a collaborative program with

JOB Malaysia and famous Malaysian companies such as PERODUA, EON and others to recruit work force from among the Indigenous people. Public Service Commission (PSC) which is a leading agency in appointing civil servants also provides job quotas for the Indigenous. Table 1.1 shows the programs and employment opportunities for Indigenous youths and their targeted participation in these areas.

Table 1.1 Vocational Skills Programs and Employment Opportunities for Indigenous People.

Program	Program Objectives	Target	Achievement 2011	Target 2012
Skills and Career Training Program	Improve the economy through job related skills training	Indigenous youths	Joined: 443 Completed: 378 Fail to complete: 65 Working: 128 MSC 2: 121	500 participants
Career Opportunities in the Field of Automotive	Collaboration with - JOB Malaysia - EON - PERODUA - PSC	Indigenous youths	Total: 1.498 Private/Government: 1003 DOAD:302 Private Sector:193	1000 participants
Skills Training	1. Paya Bungor & Damansara Damai Training Centre	Indigenous youths	PBTC : 70 DDTC: 105	PBTC : 100 DDTC : 150

Source: DOAD 2011

DOAD has two vocational training centers which are Paya Bungor Training Centre (PBTC) and Damansara Damai Training Center (DDTC). Paya Bungor Training Centre provides skills courses certified by the Malaysian Skills Certificate (MSC). This training center is an accredited center to provide the course on Female Fashion and Clothing Level I and II. This course is conducted for 8 months. Participants who complete the course will be given the Malaysian Skills Certificate by the Department of Skill Development (DSD), Ministry of Human Resources. Each intake session consists of 50 students. The Damansara Damai Training Centre offers courses such as automotive technology, motorcycle technology, repairing and painting of vehicles technology, the operation of excavators and manufacturing of female clothing (see Table 1.1).

PARTICIPATION OF INDIGENOUS IN THE FIELD OF TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL

The participation of Indigenous students in the technical and vocational education is still low. Various attempts have been made to increase Indigenous youth participation in this country such as by increasing the number of Vocational Colleges and skills training institutes which aimed to provide individuals with certain skills to help them to obtain jobs. Technical institutions and skills centers were established to provide opportunities for students especially Indigenous students, who lack the ability in the academic field to acquire specific skills so that they can gain employment and free themselves from the trap of poverty.

However, if we look to at the information obtained from the Division of Education in the State of Pahang in 2007, the number of Indigenous students pursuing education in STS and the SVS is very small at eleven percent (11%) in 2006 and seven percent (7%) (DOAD, 2012). Based on these data, it shows that very few Indigenous students enrolled in vocational education. A study conducted by Wan Mahiswandi (2001) on vocational education needs of Indigenous youths found that Indigenous youths have had a high level of knowledge about vocational education. It is therefore important for a student to know in advance of an area that he will study because this knowledge will help him to choose and identify suitable areas and then follow the lessons successfully. Knowledge about the course to take should be known in advance by a student to ensure that the selected field does not stray from the interests and needs of the students.

A total of 85,435 post-secondary school students were selected to pursue certificate and diploma courses at the Institute of Technical Education and Vocational Training (TEVT) and the Institute for Public Skills Training (IPST). This amount is an increase of 8.4 percent compared to 78,780 students offered to TEVT and IPST during 2011/2012 session (Ministry of Human Resources 2012). The students include the physically challenged students (293 candidates), Indigenous (59 candidates), athletes (741 candidates) and excellent students will follow the program in 11 TEVT and IPST across the country. Ten most popular courses include: Diploma in Hotel Management and Catering; Tourism Management; Finance and Banking; Accounting; Business Studies;

Electrical Engineering; Automotive; Management of Information Systems (IT), Civil Engineering and Diploma in Secretarial Science.

Apart from the lack of knowledge in identifying areas in vocational education, most Indigenous youth were also found to lacking the awareness that there are training institutions such as Community Colleges, MARA, and *Giat Mara*, which provide skills training courses to secondary school leavers. Therefore, students especially Indigenous pupils need to know the opportunities to further their education in the field of TVE in advance so that it could encourage interested students to continue their studies in the field of skills at a higher level. This statement is supported by Zakaria (2005) who stated that career paths should be designed at the lower secondary level itself to enable students, especially Indigenous students to better understand of their course of action immediately after completing their studies at a higher secondary school level. Opportunity to study at a higher level should also be simplified and multiplied. Thus, it is essential to provide greater opportunities for Indigenous students to select the training courses of their interest and thus obtain better employment opportunities for their future.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Although Indigenous students show interest in the field of Technical and Vocational Education, but the level of their knowledge about the value of skills required by their field is still low. Therefore, it is important for Indigenous students to gain sufficient knowledge about TVE offered in skills training institutions throughout the country. When they have sufficient knowledge, at least it can create awareness among Indigenous students about the importance of vocational education in transforming their lives. Expansion of views and knowledge about vocational can only happen if sufficient information is provided. Therefore, Indigenous students should be provided sufficient information in order to enable them to select their preferred choice of vocational program. Skills training centers should be established in their settlement so that they don't have to travel far away from their locality.

The next proposal is to introduce technical and vocational subjects for Indigenous students since primary school. Subjects offered must fit the needs and interests such as sports, music, agriculture and handicrafts. It is better if the teachers that teach technical and vocational education consist of the Indigenous teachers themselves. This is because the indigenous teacher better understands the needs, cultural background and language of their people. In the same token, mentoring system should be established to nurture younger generation of Indigenous people to succeed in lives by imitating their role models.

The third recommendation is to have a special transition program for Indigenous students who wish to connect their learning to practice the skills that are relevant to their needs and interests. A program called "*adopt-a-school*" can be proposed to establish a good relationship between an indigenous school and a training provider so that the Indigenous students are not left behind in the opportunities to learn skills immediately after completing their school. Here, the role of school counselors is important to identify the abilities and interests of Indigenous students through the survey of the students' career interests and skills. In sum, if all of the recommendations can be implemented, the future of Indigenous youth will be brighter and this will improve their social mobility and social status. The support of the government and DOAD is needed to build more Skills Training Institutions for the Indigenous population in Malaysia in order to upgrade their quality of life.

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