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DECISION DILEMMAS: HIGHER EDUCATION PURSUITS OR WORKFORCE ENTRY AMONG SPM GRADUATES

Irma Wani Othman^{1*}, Saifulazry Mokhtar^{2*}, Mohd Khairi Lebai Ahmad^{3*}, Roslan Diming⁴, Khadijah Ag Bakar⁵, Muhammad Safuan Yusoff⁶

¹ Centre for the Promotion of Knowledge and Language Learning, Universiti Malaysia Sabah, Malaysia
Email: irma@ums.edu.my

² Centre for the Promotion of Knowledge and Language Learning, Universiti Malaysia Sabah, Malaysia
Email: saifulazry.mokhtar@ums.edu.my

³ Kolej Tingkatan Enam Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia
Email: g-09243566@moe-dl.edu.my

⁴ Sektor Pendidikan Islam, Jabatan Pendidikan Negeri Sabah, Malaysia
Email: roslan.diming@moe.gov.my

⁵ Lembaga Hasil Dalam Negeri Cawangan Sabah, Malaysia
Email: khadijah.ag@hasil.gov.my

⁶ Labuan Faculty of International Finance, Universiti Malaysia Sabah, Malaysia
Email: safuan_y@yahoo.com

* Corresponding Author

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Abstract:

Education holds a paramount and prioritized status within any nation, notably in Malaysia, where it is viewed as the key to progress and national prosperity. However, in contemporary times, education has become a secondary choice for the younger generation, especially those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Therefore, the decision to continue education or enter the workforce has become a heatedly debated issue in the current era of globalization, presenting challenges and dilemmas, particularly for those who have recently completed their studies at the Sijil Peperiksaan Malaysia (SPM) level. This paper delves into four issues contributing to the dilemma and challenges, namely (i) the diminishing relevance of the concept of continuing education; (ii) uncertainties in the economic sector often acting as barriers for the youth to pursue further studies; (iii) an individual's interest in academic pursuits—an issue not to be underestimated; and (iv) graduate unemployment within the country causing distress among graduates due to a lack of job guarantees after studying, leading the youth to fear pursuing higher education. This literature-oriented research applies a comprehensive reading technique, systematically analyzing relevant articles on graduate careers to address the four highlighted issues. The findings indicate (a) a phenomenon referring to the notably low starting salaries for fresh graduates, serving as a measure of a graduate's potential based on the study period; it becomes irrelevant as a

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student's interest in working independently, such as venturing into small-scale business, surpasses the desire to pursue higher education; (b) Financial issues within families prevent them from covering their children's educational expenses, exacerbated by workforce reductions involving family breadwinners covering school-related expenses; (c) Lack of interest in academics leads individuals to immerse themselves in the workforce. Therefore, education or learning is crucial in our lives; and (d) Work experience is emphasized by employers when seeking employment. These findings prove that the given issues pose dilemmas and challenges, causing the youth to opt for work over further education. The direction concerning the issue of continuing education or entering the workforce for high school graduates is related to education, serving as a benchmark for a rapidly developing nation. However, from the perspective of the younger generation, education should be understood as an important bridge of knowledge to ensure a bright life based on intellectual, emotional, and physical skills.

Keywords:

Education, Employment, Learning, Youth, Graduates

Introduction

Continuing education is not an easy choice due to numerous factors acting as barriers. In connection with this, this assignment discusses somewhat the issues driving this dilemma. In 2019, the Department of Statistics reported a study related to statistical data on the number of high school students continuing their studies and those immediately entering the workforce, as well as the job market. Out of 560,000 SPM candidates who took the exams and received certificates, only around 170,000 chose to pursue higher education. Meanwhile, the remaining students, approximately 390,000 SPM candidates, chose to work immediately (Metro, 2023). Based on a survey by the Department of Statistics, it was found that 72.1 percent of SPM graduates did not continue their studies (Ahmad, 2022). Although this data is from 2019, it shows a similar and continuing pattern through 2020 to the present. This indicates that more SPM candidates choose to work immediately rather than pursue further education. This issue arises because the concept of continuing education has become irrelevant, the uncertain economic sector poses a challenge to continuing education, lack of interest in learning, and a lack of job guarantees after studying causing graduates to fear pursuing higher education. The importance of education can bring about changes towards the prosperity of the country and the individual's bright life.

Therefore, this paper will discuss four issues leading to these dilemmas and challenges. One of the emphasized issues is that many students choose to continue their education because (i) the concept of continuing education is becoming increasingly irrelevant. This phenomenon refers to the low starting salaries for fresh graduates, which serve as a measure of a graduate's potential based on the study period. It also becomes irrelevant because a student's interest in working independently, such as venturing into small-scale business, supersedes the desire to pursue higher education (Halim & Sahid, 2020). Unbeknownst to us, an issue arises where the concept of continuing education has become irrelevant. This poses some dilemmas and challenges for young individuals, leading to concerns and doubts.

One factor contributing to the concept of continuing education becoming irrelevant is the societal perception of the overall impact of learning. This perception revolves around the organizational and corporate injustice in selecting employees, as some graduates do not receive

any job offers after completing their studies (Mohamed et al., 2020). The shift in the country's higher education paradigm, facing challenges in graduate employability in the post-pandemic era, further complicates matters by making it difficult for graduates to be offered jobs based on their qualifications (Othman, 2021c). Even if job offers are extended, the salaries offered are significantly lower compared to non-certified workers. This is because the salaries offered are based on the worker's experience (Mohd Shah, 2021b).

As a result, the concept of continuing education is deemed irrelevant by many, particularly university graduates, as it is considered not worthwhile and merely a time-consuming process. Moreover, this irrelevance is compounded by the fact that courses offered do not align with the job market (Hashim, Kee & Rahman, 2016; Yusoff, Ismail & Sidin, 2008). These courses are no longer deemed necessary by companies when hiring employees because the knowledge acquired is considered general and easily attainable by anyone in the current era, making it challenging for graduates to find jobs. Many graduates regret pursuing courses that are no longer in demand.

Additionally, an individual teenager's interest in working also contributes to the concept of continuing education becoming irrelevant. The desire to earn money at a young age often deters students from pursuing further studies. Some even opt to work independently, engaging in small-scale businesses immediately after completing the SPM exams (Husin, 2021). This shift in focus from education to immediate employment highlights a growing trend where practical experience and early financial independence take precedence over traditional academic pursuits.

In conclusion, the concept of continuing education becoming irrelevant presents a complex issue that influences the decisions of young individuals, especially SPM graduates. The societal perception of the impact of learning, the challenges in graduate employability, the mismatch between offered courses and job market needs, and individual interests contribute to the growing irrelevance of continuing education. This poses dilemmas and challenges for the youth, impacting their choices between entering the workforce and pursuing further studies.

Issue 1: The Concept of Continuing Education Has Become Irrelevant

Entering the workforce immediately without any relevant work experience is no easy feat. However, there are numerous advantages to working right after completing secondary education. This includes having ample time to enhance self-knowledge in the job market and concurrently accumulating a wealth of experience. Such experience proves invaluable when an individual seeks employment in a more prestigious company or applies for a promotion, desiring a change after an extended period in the same job (Halim & Sahid, 2020). Unbeknownst to us, an issue arises where the concept of continuing education has become irrelevant. This contributes somewhat to the dilemma and challenges faced by young individuals, instilling worries, and uncertainties within.

The concept of continuing education has become irrelevant due to societal perceptions of the overall impact of learning. This pertains to the perception related to organizational and corporate injustices in selecting employees. This occurs because there are graduates who do not receive any job offers upon completing their studies (Mohamed et al., 2020). Furthermore, the paradigm shifts in the country's higher education, grappling with the employability challenges of university graduates in the post-pandemic era, complicates matters further. Graduates find it challenging to secure jobs based on their qualifications, and when offers are

extended, the salaries offered are significantly lower than those offered to non-certified workers, as they are based on the worker's experience (Mohd Shah, 2021b).

Hence, the concept of continuing education is considered irrelevant by many, particularly university graduates, as it is perceived as not worthwhile and merely a time-consuming process. Moreover, this irrelevance is compounded by the fact that courses offered do not align with the demands of the job market (Hashim, Kee & Rahman, 2016; Yusoff, Ismail & Sidin, 2008). These courses are no longer deemed necessary by companies when hiring employees because the knowledge acquired is considered general and easily attainable by anyone in the current era, making it challenging for graduates to find jobs. Many graduates regret pursuing courses that are no longer in demand.

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In conclusion, the concept of continuing education becoming irrelevant presents a complex issue that influences the decisions of young individuals, especially SPM graduates. The societal perception of the impact of learning, the challenges in graduate employability, the mismatch between offered courses and job market needs, and individual interests contribute to the growing irrelevance of continuing education. This poses dilemmas and challenges for the youth, impacting their choices between entering the workforce and pursuing further studies.

Issue 2: Uncertain Economic Sector as A Challenge to Continue Education

Economics and education are closely intertwined components that complement each other in the development of an advanced and rapidly progressing nation. The economy plays a pivotal role in allocating resources to develop educational institutions' infrastructure, including primary schools, secondary schools, and higher education universities (Esa et al., 2022). Furthermore, the economy is responsible for providing educational aid funds to the youth from financially challenged families, enabling them to pursue further education, especially those with high goals and aspirations for tertiary education (Adam et al., 2022). Beyond the economic realm, education stands as a critical aspect influencing efforts to transform Malaysia into an advanced nation. This is asserted because quality education can produce and cultivate intelligent individuals, empowering them to think critically based on the acquired knowledge, thereby leading the country towards a brighter future (Othman et al., 2021a). Additionally, educated individuals indirectly contribute to rational thinking, offering insightful opinions in the nation's development endeavors. This, undoubtedly, facilitates rapid national development, improving the economy and achieving a balanced state.

Moreover, quality education has the power to generate a competitive young generation. Mastery in the field of education allows the younger generation to possess extensive knowledge related to the intricacies of national issues, enabling them to adeptly resolve conflicts. Hence, it is evident that the economy and education are two crucial components that demand attention from both the government and society. However, the issue of an uncertain economic sector has become a significant challenge faced by the younger generation in pursuing higher education.

Many young individuals are compelled to decide to seek employment immediately after completing their secondary education. This phenomenon arises due to the impact of an unstable national economy on the rising costs of goods and the expenses associated with further education. Consequently, financially disadvantaged young individuals find it difficult to realize their dreams of pursuing higher education. In the end, a considerable number of the younger generation opts not to pursue higher education as they prefer to avoid the burden of higher living costs, particularly the expenses associated with their educational pursuits not be underestimated. Education and learning are integral aspects of our lives, encompassing not only worldly knowledge but also knowledge applicable in the afterlife. Unfortunately, in this era of globalization, we witness many young individuals showing a lack of interest in learning, lacking aspirations to become knowledgeable and virtuous individuals (Abdul Taib & Saad, 2019; Said & Hussin, 2006). Furthermore, quality education is crucial as it represents the effort exerted by the younger generation to transform their good individual or group skills, contributing to the formation of graduates or professionals through teaching and training processes. Education also enhances students' academic achievements, grounded in the balance of physical, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual aspects (JERI) (Ismail, 2011).

Moreover, education is an ongoing process that can develop potential and diverse skills comprehensively. This aligns with the government's aspiration to produce a globally competitive younger generation, reflecting the nation's goal to nurture an outstanding and distinguished younger generation. The development of education in the country has led to growth and competitiveness in the field of national education. Based on the National Mission, a collective effort is essential to ensure the mission's success, aligning with the theme of the 9th Malaysia Plan (RMK9), "Together Towards Excellence, Glory, and Distinction" (Othman, Rahim & Abu Bakar, 2022a). Various elements encompass learning style aspects, including the application and utilization of learning styles such as visual, auditory, and kinesthetic (Sadiq & Hassan, 2021). Additionally, the motivational aspect, which can be observed through elements in students' motivation, such as intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Kačamakovic & Lokaj, 2021). Therefore, students or the younger generation must identify suitable learning styles or aspects to achieve the effectiveness of optimal teaching and learning. Appropriate teaching strategies should be aligned with students' motivation to foster individuals who can explore their potential and capabilities and cultivate an interest in learning.

Issue 3: Lack of Interest in Learning as A Cause for The Youth to Enter the Workforce

Interest is a crucial factor that propels an individual to engage in activities with enthusiasm and sincerity, devoid of boredom. The presence of deep interest can prevent individuals from adopting a nonchalant attitude. Nevertheless, the lack of interest, particularly among the youth, in education or learning, is an issue that should not be underestimated. Education and learning are integral aspects of our lives, encompassing not only worldly knowledge but also knowledge applicable in the afterlife. Unfortunately, in this era of globalization, we witness many young individuals showing a lack of interest in learning, lacking aspirations to become knowledgeable and virtuous individuals (Abdul Taib & Saad, 2019; Said & Hussin, 2006). Furthermore, quality education is crucial as it represents the effort exerted by the younger generation to transform their good individual or group skills, contributing to the formation of graduates or professionals through teaching and training processes. Education also enhances students' academic achievements, grounded in the balance of physical, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual aspects (JERI) (Ismail, 2011).

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Issue 4: Lack Of Job Assurance After Studies Causes Youth to Fear Continuing Education

In the wake of globalization sweeping across the world, young individuals should rightfully be concerned about their future, especially when venturing into the workforce. Job assurance undoubtedly becomes a focal point for youths contemplating furthering their studies. Education serves to transform family life for the better, a weapon that aids individuals in leading a more fulfilling life and securing a good job. If, after pursuing education, one returns to the same life as before, then all the diligent efforts invested become futile. This scenario is akin to returning empty-handed after a long journey. The repercussions of such occurrences are highly undesirable, as events like graduate unemployment can lead to a decline in the percentage of students considering advancing their education to higher levels, such as a bachelor's degree. The entrenched fear will continue to spread, adversely affecting the education sector in the country. Furthermore, the national economy has also been affected following the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus since 2020 (Othman, Mokhtar & Esa, 2022b).

For those aspiring to pursue further studies, there are many factors to consider, especially the required financing. Therefore, the significance of job assurance for a student, particularly for those from less privileged families, becomes evident. This is because, to pursue education, most students rely on government aid, namely scholarships and loans from the National Higher Education Fund Corporation (PTPTN) (Awang et al., 2017; Husin, 2021). Despite some students not having to repay these loans upon obtaining a first-class degree, they are not granted freely. Hence, if graduates fail to secure employment after completing their studies, the burden of debt from PTPTN becomes increasingly burdensome. Additionally, the cost of living in the present day is on the rise, prompting many graduates to contemplate not continuing their education to higher levels, despite their awareness that education is crucial in daily life. Consequently, the youth are more inclined to work exclusively. They tend to adopt the mindset that working immediately can yield more substantial profits than investing money in further education, which might ultimately result in unemployment. Education is a privilege when bestowed upon those who know how to utilize it, but sometimes, making the wrong choice of field can lead to unexpected outcomes. Therefore, the employability of graduates must be studied to minimize the unemployment rate among them.

Literature Review

Education, paramount for national progress in Malaysia, faces a shifting paradigm, notably among the economically disadvantaged youth. In contemporary times, the younger generation, particularly those completing their Sijil Peperiksaan Malaysia (SPM), grapple with the crucial decision between pursuing further education or entering the workforce. This choice has become a heated debate in the era of globalization, introducing challenges and dilemmas. The evolving landscape prompts a critical examination of the factors influencing this decision-making process and the broader implications on the nation's educational and economic trajectory.

Issue 1: The Irrelevance of Continuing Education Concept

The starting salary of a fresh graduate is considered a potential indicator of career advancement (Ge, Kankanhalli & Huang, 2015). Several studies draw from qualitative interview data from hiring managers across a wide range of U.S. public sector and private industries, examining how employers define overqualification and mismatched qualifications and whether they are willing to hire applicants whose educational and work experience credentials do not match job requirements (Kulkarni, Lengnick-Hall & Martinez, 2015). The data were analyzed and coded to identify themes related to managers' perceptions of overqualification, matched and mismatched qualifications, and how these were related to selection decisions. A typology is proposed for categorizing applicant qualification levels and their potential human resource outcomes, such as hiring decisions. Findings show that hiring managers report that they are willing to interview and hire individuals whose education or experience exceeds a job's requirements, as well as applicants with less than required education, but only if they possess sufficient compensatory experience (Kulkarni, Lengnick-Hall & Martinez, 2015). The findings may not apply to industries where minimum educational levels are essential or to small organizations with few opportunities for career advancement. Nevertheless, considering social implications and the current unemployment and underemployment levels, our findings can inform the job search strategies of job seekers. Overqualified applicants should not refrain from applying to job openings, particularly in organizations with opportunities for advancement and where education is considered an asset (Kulkarni, Lengnick-Hall & Martinez, 2015; Sikora et al., 2016). Additionally, applicants should reveal their motivations for pursuing intentional mismatches. In contrast to previous studies conducted during periods of lower unemployment and underemployment, these data include managers' perceptions of overqualification in a recession and post-recession job market context and are especially relevant to today's employment context (Sikora et al., 2016). The proposed typology distinguishes between categorizations of qualified, overqualified, and underqualified, helping to further refine studies of selection decisions.

Malaysian employers demand high proficiency in soft skills. They look beyond academic results when interviewing new staff; hence, undergraduates acquiring soft skills is an important issue from different perspectives: employers, the education system, and the students themselves (David & Saeipoor, 2018). Despite this emphasis, potential employees, according to employers, lack soft skills. Considering the importance of this issue, this paper's objective is to comprehend and highlight the perception of undergraduates of the soft skills programs in five research universities in Malaysia. The information presented in this paper is obtained from a survey conducted by distributing 600 questionnaires to undergraduates in Malaysia's five research universities to determine their understanding of soft skills and how these skills are taught and evaluated in these universities (David & Saeipoor, 2018). The initial findings show that there is a strong awareness of the importance of soft skills among undergraduates, but the students are not clear about the methods of teaching and evaluating these skills in different

courses in different universities (David & Saeipoor, 2018). The results illustrate a need for universities, in general, to develop strategies to enhance soft skills teaching and learning and make undergraduates aware of how these skills are evaluated. The results also suggest that integrating soft skills into university courses does not follow a standard procedure, and each university may value and emphasize a different skill. It appears, therefore, that if universities collaborate on their knowledge and experience, they may be able to offer a more practical and beneficial soft skill-training program for undergraduates.

Another study aims to find out the view students at the National University of Malaysia (UKM) campus Bangi have on self-employed culture (Mainor & Sieng, 2020). The study sample consisting of 150 students who had their own work or individuals interested in starting their own work answered the questionnaire. The results show that most students prefer to work on their own rather than working with their employer or based on a given salary. For those who have done the job, the individuals involved will still choose to continue their work (Mainor & Sieng, 2020). Whereas, for those students who just want to venture out with no knowledge or work-related jobs on their own, they are more interested in doing the job. Self-employment is often associated with entrepreneurship. The findings of this study provide opportunities for students to have or participate in entrepreneurial pursuits and can bring about change in themselves to become more involved in their own field of work. What is the relationship between money and well-being? Research distinguishes between two forms of well-being: people's feelings during the moments of life (experienced well-being) and people's evaluation of their lives when they pause and reflect (evaluative well-being). Drawing on 1,725,994 experience-sampling reports from 33,391 employed US adults, the present results show that both experienced and evaluative well-being increased linearly with $\log(\text{income})$, with an equally steep slope for higher earners as for lower earners (Killingsworth, 2021). There was no evidence for an experienced well-being plateau above \$75,000/y, contrary to some influential past research. There was also no evidence of an income threshold at which experienced and evaluative well-being diverged, suggesting that higher incomes are associated with both feeling better day-to-day and being more satisfied with life overall.

Another study develops a multi-sector job search model with college education as noisy signals on workers' qualification for skilled tasks to analyze the underlying channel of 'degree-inflation,' measured by the proportion of highly educated workforce employed at unskilled positions (i.e., cross-skill matches) (Sim, Ishimaru & Seki, 2015). It demonstrates that recent information and communication technology progress without a corresponding improvement in workers' qualification generate a considerable mass of cross-skill matches, which crowds out the unskilled workforce and suppresses unskilled wages. As a result, the college premium remains substantial, and the college enrollment rate is self-reinforced. The numerical experiments based on the Canadian data from the early 1980s to 2000s suggest that without degree inflation, the unskilled, skilled, and overall wages in the Canadian labor market would be higher by (up to) 46, 43, and 56 percent, respectively, in the early 2000s (Sim, Ishimaru & Seki, 2015). To this extent, resolving the degree inflation problem, for example, through improving the quality of higher education, would induce substantial welfare gains not only to skilled workers but also to unskilled workers.

Micro firms are more important in Poland than in other European Union (EU) member states because Polish micro firms represent a larger share of the total number of Polish firms and contribute more to total turnover and gross value added than EU micro firms (Sim, Ishimaru & Seki, 2015). Polish students exhibit substantial interest in starting their own businesses. This

paper presents the results of a study examining the entrepreneurial attitudes of 458 students. The goal of the study was to identify relationships between academic majors and academic programs and the extent to which students were ready to start their own business. The analysis revealed that although the choice of academic major did not influence student readiness to start a business, there was an association between academic programs and student readiness to start their own business. Respondent gender influenced the extent to which students were prepared to start their own business due to gender differences in access to business start-up financing.

Therefore, the concept of continuing education has become irrelevant when it is associated with the issue of unemployment, which is often discussed not only in Malaysia but also globally, facing the issue of graduate unemployment. This situation is contributed to by graduates paying less attention and showing insufficient interest and effort in enhancing employability skills while pursuing their studies at university. There is a study that examines the regression effects of employability skills on self-efficacy and the regression effects of self-efficacy on entrepreneurial behavior and career exploration among university graduates (Maidin et al., 2021; Othman et al., 2021b). The findings of this study show that employability skills have a significant influence on the self-efficacy of graduates. The findings also show that self-efficacy has a significant influence on entrepreneurial behavior and career exploration. This study focuses only on the existing skills possessed by university graduates to enhance self-efficacy, which subsequently influences entrepreneurial behavior and career exploration. Therefore, future studies need to look at external factors or student environmental factors that may help improve graduates' self-efficacy towards career exploration and entrepreneurial behavior.

Issue 2: Uncertain Economic Sectors as A Challenge to Continuing Education

Education is a critical aspect of human capital development in an economy. High-quality human capital can drive a country's economic development more effectively and holistically. Developing nations like Malaysia, aiming to progress towards advanced status, allocate a high expenditure rate to the education sector every year in the national budget to align with the country's advancement rate. The annual increase in education allocation aims to ensure that the quality of human capital produced is commensurate with the progress achieved by the nation (Othman, Esa, Hajimin, and Marinsah, 2021d). The production of high-quality human capital will directly contribute to the knowledge-based economy, thereby creating value-added contributions to the overall development of the country (Abang Muis et al., 2021). However, the current phenomenon of excessive investment in education is feared to contribute to an increase in educated unemployment. This indirect consequence may lead to an inflationary impact on education within the country when the net returns on education become negative or reduced. This situation arises due to workers being forced to accept jobs with lower requirements or qualifications than their educational qualifications. Estimation of this phenomenon utilizes the fundamental Mincer income model (1974), modified to detect the existence or non-existence of overeducation in the public sector in Putrajaya (Ationg et al., 2021; Marzuki et al., 2021). In this study, a total of 400 public sector workers in Putrajaya were surveyed in 2015 to examine this phenomenon in the public labor market. Survey results indicate the occurrence of overeducation phenomena in the labor market in the public sector in Putrajaya. Overeducation is also tested in terms of school years, education levels, and gender. Therefore, these results can provide some guidance and reference for the country's education policymakers.

Currently, poverty is a growing issue in urban communities. The rising cost of living, driven by rapid urbanization, forces urban communities to compromise essential interests for survival

(Mohd Zin & Tambi, 2018). Urban poverty conditions can lead to more severe consequences when individuals sacrifice their children's education rights for survival instead of achieving financial stability. These circumstances result in a lack of proper education and decreased career success compared to others. Consequently, a group of late bloomers emerges, forced to sacrifice their youth by working for financial security before pursuing optimal education, as is common among their peers at a later age. Low education levels are often associated with rural populations due to constraints in education, employment, and income. This is related to familial factors that cause rural communities to have lower education levels. The study reveals that nearly 40 percent of respondents attribute the low level of primary education in rural areas to financial factors associated with the lower income earned by the head of the family (Buck & Deutsch, 2014). Additionally, the educational background of the head of the family affects the educational attainment of their children. Despite being aware of the importance of education for future generations, the emphasis on educational opportunities, particularly in rural areas, needs to be more accurately strengthened.

In the current scenario, many individuals lament the rising cost of living, irrespective of whether they reside in urban or rural areas. Financial issues affecting students in higher education institutions are among the prevailing financial concerns. Most students rely entirely on educational loans to sustain their lives as students in public or private higher education institutions. Economic uncertainty today has compelled students to have at least basic financial management skills (Aisyah & Wajeeha, 2016; Wahid & Zahari, 2020). This is because this group is susceptible to poor financial management, leading to financial issues and pressure on the academic and personal performance of students. The pertinent question is whether it is crucial to identify the extent of financial problems among students, financial management practices, and the stress faced by students that leave negative impacts on learning. A total of 112 students from the International Islamic University College Selangor were purposefully sampled from the Faculty of Mualamah Management (Nisha & Norziah, 2017). The study findings indicate that the majority of respondents facing financial problems come from low-income families or households, i.e., B40, and their educational funding comes entirely from loans such as PTPTN (Nisha & Norziah, 2017). The results also highlight that the financial resources obtained each semester are insufficient to cover expenses. Most students believe they must work part-time to assist in financing their education, in addition to parental assistance. Therefore, all parties, especially the government, should address this issue to prevent its escalation, such as increasing funding in line with the current cost of living to ensure that the funds obtained are sufficient to support learning and expenses every semester.

There are myriad interconnected causes of poverty, making it challenging to employ a singular solution for eradication. However, education can be viewed as a mitigating factor against the risk of persistent poverty, potentially preventing the perpetuation of poverty across generations. In underdeveloped and developing countries, there is an innate understanding that education offers opportunities for children that their parents did not have. Conversely, in developed countries, there is much to be learned and relearned about the vital role of education. Those living in poverty understand that sending their children to school can provide opportunities that they themselves did not have. Even though education alone might not be sufficient due to the multidimensional nature of poverty, it is plausible to consider it crucial in reducing social exclusion. Inflation is a burning issue that hinders a country's economic growth, directly impacting the standard of living. The responsibility of governments, politicians, and economists is to protect the common man from inflation (Bhattacharjee, 2017). Inflation, defined as the rise in the price of goods and services, diminishes the purchasing power of the

people. As the general price level increases, individuals can purchase fewer goods and services with each unit of currency, resulting in a gradual decrease in purchasing power. In this situation, the real value of currency depreciates, leading to an increase in the value of goods and services, establishing a close relationship between inflation or price hikes and education.

Various aspects contribute to a community becoming impoverished, such as deindustrialization, high unemployment rates, untreated mental health, and violent crimes. Both rural and urban impoverished communities face numerous issues, including dilapidated housing, lack of access to professional services, and, most importantly, inferior education. The inferiority of education is attributed to several factors, including students arriving at school with multiple issues that teachers struggle to address through instruction. Structural inadequacies in school facilities have been proven to impact the quality of instruction. Although teachers are qualified, they often lack support from school administration. School administrators are occupied with their own issues in deciding how to allocate their limited budget. Poverty is a vast and complex issue that plagues communities in a seemingly endless cycle.

Issue 3: Lack Of Interest in Learning as A Cause of Youth Employment

The youth are influenced by their peers to discontinue their education and embark on their professional journey. Peer influence, referring to individuals of similar age, plays a crucial role in the lives of students or young people. According to Quek Miow Leng Hamzaha (2006), replaced by Hamzah, Suandi, Hamzah & Tamam (2013), peers significantly impact the lives of young individuals. This is because peer influence can have negative repercussions on the lives of the youth, affecting their thoughts and behaviors. Due to the close bond and reliance on peers, young individuals may listen to and follow their peers in any matter. Studies reveal that, in areas such as moral responsibility, courage, honesty, and camaraderie, adolescents are more influenced by the opinions and views of their peers than those of their parents (Hamzah et al., 2013). If a peer decides to work and discontinue education, the young individual is likely to follow suit. Therefore, young individuals must play a role in choosing their peers wisely and not easily succumb to the activities and thoughts of their peers.

The lack of interest in learning leading to youth employment is also associated with digital poverty, indicating a shortage of ICT-based goods and services. The need for ICT has become fundamental to students, especially during the challenges of Teaching and Learning (T&L) in the Covid-19 era (Ibrahim & Othman, 2022). The shift to online T&L has exacerbated the digital divide among students, affecting their access to quality education. Digital poverty encompasses Internet access, knowledge, physical resources, economic capacity, and social aspects. Therefore, this study aims to identify the factors of digital poverty among students at Universiti Malaysia Terengganu and their impact on academic performance (Ibrahim & Othman, 2022). The study employs a quantitative approach based on a survey of 100 respondents from the third year of the 2019/2020 session, representing two different study fields: social science and pure science. A crucial finding is that the learning environment significantly influences students' academic performance. The majority of students from both study fields agree that a conducive learning environment is essential for focusing on the T&L process. In conjunction with a positive learning environment, family support is also a factor influencing learning performance. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that digital poverty is not merely a financial factor but encompasses various aspects of life, such as the learning environment and social support.

In the context of this paper, education is one of the most crucial benchmarks for determining the quality of human life. Education plays a pivotal role in achieving desired job outcomes, portraying an individual's depth of knowledge in their chosen field, and representing the culmination of acquired knowledge. The Malaysian government is consistently concerned about the education system in the country. A civilized society is one that is educated and possesses high self-confidence to lead an optimistic and appreciated life (Samian & Awang, 2017). Education acts as a catalyst for a more prosperous human life, contributing to improved economic management in family life, credibility in human relationships, and personal balance in physical, mental, and spiritual aspects. Identified sub-components of life quality in education include the level of discipline in schools, school fee payments, teaching by schoolteachers, the system and methods of learning in schools, opportunities for further education, sufficiency of religious education in secondary schools, the transition from school textbooks to e-books for students, and educational achievements. A study conducted in Hulu Langat District found that overall, the educational quality of life for the suburban community in Hulu Langat is balanced (Samian & Awang, 2017). In conclusion, efforts to improve the quality of life in the education component require specific control and well-organized planning to ensure that the suburban community can cultivate a first-class mindset based on educational components.

Self-confidence driven by deep interest is crucial to ensuring that individuals maintain a positive mindset and remain motivated in their daily lives as students. The correct learning style is also vital to ensure continuous excellence and confidence in academic affairs. Global statistics indicate that approximately 11.5% of South Korean students commit suicide due to the stress of school examinations (Mohamed Jaafer Sadiq & Hassan, 2021). In Malaysia, there have been cases where high-achieving SPM students committed suicide due to a lack of confidence in their studies (Mohamed Jaafer Sadiq & Hassan, 2021). Hence, it is essential to study the level, relationship, and differences between self-concept, learning style, and academic motivation. For example, a study conducted at Universiti Putra Malaysia among first-year students in the 2019/2020 session, involving 251 respondents, found that these students had high levels of self-concept, intrinsic academic motivation, and extrinsic academic motivation. Respondents were also more inclined towards visual and kinesthetic learning styles than auditory learning styles, demonstrating a positive correlation between self-concept and academic motivation. Significant differences were found in self-concept, visual learning style, and academic motivation concerning interest, where parents, teachers, and students themselves must play a crucial role in ensuring that academic motivation remains high.

The discussion also encompasses the impact of declining youth interest amid the sudden increase in the cost of living. Many families have been affected by income loss due to the economic downturn caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. Since the outbreak of Covid-19 in 2019 until 2021, the country's economy has plummeted, resulting in numerous families losing income and jobs to sustain their daily lives (Yusoff et al., 2021). The impact of the cost of living on students to meet their basic daily needs in the current uncertain economic situation is substantial. Therefore, young individuals forced to sacrifice their education and work any job to assist their families face financial challenges. Their parents are unable to pay their children's examination fees due to insufficient funds. Poverty often occurs, especially among those living in rural areas, despite various government aid initiatives. Challenges of living in poverty include difficulties in covering daily expenses, continuing education, owning assets, engaging in part-time work, and the threat of social issues. This scenario provides a clearer picture for stakeholders to better understand the challenges of living in poverty. The highest expenditure faced by students is tuition fees, averaging RM2031.94 per student in Malaysian higher

education institutions (Nizad et al., 2018). Consequently, young individuals are more willing to work than to pursue education because of the high costs involved.

Currently, many complain about the rising cost of living, whether in urban or rural areas. One of the financial issues affecting students in higher education institutions is the reliance on study loans to sustain their lives as students in public or private higher education institutions. Economic uncertainty has prompted students to acquire basic financial management skills, as this group is vulnerable to poor financial management, leading to financial problems and pressure on academic performance and personality. Numerous studies have been conducted to identify the level of financial problems among students, financial management practices, and the pressure faced by students, leaving negative effects on learning. The study found that most respondents facing financial problems come from low-income family backgrounds, namely the B40 group, and their sources of study funds are entirely from loans such as PTPTN. The study's findings also revealed that the financial resources obtained each semester are insufficient to cover expenses. The majority of students also feel compelled to work part-time to assist in financing their education, in addition to parental assistance. Therefore, all parties, especially the government, should address this issue to prevent it from persisting, such as increasing funding in line with the current cost of living, ensuring that the funds obtained are sufficient to cover learning and living expenses every semester.

Additionally, the research results discuss that more than 70% of young people who do not have a diploma or a bachelor's degree, known as non-graduates, can benefit from available skill training (Goh & Omar, 2020). Young people are often advised to obtain a degree or diploma for a better future. However, with the digitization and automation of jobs, this guarantee is becoming increasingly fragile, especially for those without a degree or diploma. Therefore, what is the best path or option for their future? According to the Malaysian Labor Force Survey 2019, 86% of the country's labor force does not have a higher education certificate (Goh & Omar, 2020). Based on the 2018 Graduate Statistics Report and the 2018 Annual Statistics Report, it is estimated that about 77% of Malaysians aged 20-34, namely the youth, do not have a degree or diploma (Goh & Omar, 2020). Typically, those without a degree or diploma are involved in semi-skilled and low-skilled jobs. These job sectors are among the most threatened by digitization and automation, especially in the world of COVID-19. Without effective support to enhance their skills, this group is among the most at risk of losing their livelihoods.

Issue 4: Lack Of Job Assurance After Graduation as A Cause of Youth Reluctance to Continue Education

The youth and education are integral assets to the nation. Therefore, it is undeniable that producing educated youth capable of leading the country in the future is of paramount importance. Considering the discussed issue, various initiatives need to be taken to encourage the employability of graduates within the country. According to the Malaysian Youth Development Research Institute (IYRES), education is a crucial foundation in ensuring the implementation and sustainability of Malaysia's economic plans (Mohamed et al., 2020). Each individual should be seen as a valuable resource and should not be marginalized from contributing to the overall economy. Thus, special attention should be given to the group of youth who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET) so that they can continue to play their role in the country's economy. A comprehensive system needs to be formulated to assist this marginalized youth group in becoming active agents in the national economy. Therefore, the government has developed the Malaysian Youth Index (IBM) with the aim of being a measure of change in the well-being of the nation's youth (Haris et al., 2016). In the

11th Malaysia Plan, 1.5 million new job opportunities were created to address the issue of youth unemployment (Haris et al., 2016). However, the problem of youth unemployment continues to persist. Therefore, the country's efforts to provide knowledgeable and skilled youth with added value in the competitiveness and productivity of the nation need to be intensified (Haris et al., 2016).

Furthermore, addressing the issue of graduate employability, it is estimated that over 500,000 unemployed individuals in Malaysia are recorded, with the age group of 15-24 years contributing the highest to this figure (Aziz @ Dorashid, 2020). This indicates that young people find it difficult to secure employment. The Chief Secretary's Audit Report 2018 Series 1 touched on the 1Malaysia Training Scheme (SL1M) (Ngah, 2018). Introduced by the government in 2011, this program aims to enhance the employability of local graduates in securing jobs. One improvement suggested based on the audit report is to update the collection of actual performance data of graduates trained through SL1M. With this data, programs aimed at improving the employability of graduates can be better tailored, allowing us to propose solutions to the challenges faced by the youth in employment rather than assigning blame to any particular party.

Referring to the upload by the Malaysian Institute of Islamic Understanding (IKIM), employment is the primary opportunity for individuals to sustain their lives. The effort to earn this income is a highly valued practice in the sight of Allah SWT. In the book *Al-Kasb* in the work of Imam Muhammad Ibn Al-Hassan Al-Shaybani, it is narrated that Umar al-Khattab, for example, mentioned that dying on the saddle of a camel while seeking Allah's bounty is more favorable than being killed in the struggle for Allah's sake (IKIM). Such is the high value of working to sustain oneself and one's family, regardless of the nature of the job as long as it is halal. In the current context, graduates who have not yet found equivalent employment should not despair in seeking their ideal jobs. Temporary jobs undertaken now may seem insignificant to society, but they hold immense significance in the eyes of Allah. Even though the wages may be modest, this effort is highly valued and beloved by Allah SWT. Therefore, young individuals should distance themselves from disappointment and despair. Instead, they should earnestly strive in every job they undertake and always pray for a better future (Malaysian Institute of Islamic Understanding (IKIM), 2019).

In reality, Malaysia possesses a rich and excellent human capital. While acknowledging that there is room for improvement, our human capital is ready to work from the ground level with moderate salaries. Referring to the "School to Work Transition Survey" by the Khazanah Research Institute (KRI) released in 2018, young individuals seeking employment set their salary targets around RM1715 per month, compared to employers' estimates ranging from RM2400 to RM3000 per month (Abu Rahim, 2019). This indicates that not all young individuals, especially graduates, are selective about their jobs. Employability enhancement programs should act as a double-edged sword. Besides providing a platform to enhance graduates' skills, these programs should centrally and efficiently gather relevant data to serve as a guide in addressing similar employment issues in the future. We can no longer rely solely on societal assumptions and employer experiences to justify the high unemployment rate among graduates. A more comprehensive understanding needs to be accurately identified in this issue. Findings from audit reports on employability enhancement programs such as SL1M should be used as guidance for similar programs in the future. As members of the public, we have a collective responsibility to support young individuals in their jobs. As families, there should be no shame if a child is not working according to their qualifications. As employers,

pay fair wages commensurate with the tasks performed by young individuals and provide platforms for them to enhance their skills. As young individuals, you are the most responsible for actively seeking good employment, being disciplined at work, being loyal, always seeking to improve your skills, being patient at work, managing finances well, and being aware of the support provided by family, employers, and the country (Malaysian Institute of Islamic Understanding (IKIM), 2019).

Additionally, the government provides initiatives for the youth, such as the Family Work Guarantee Initiative. According to the 9th Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob, this initiative includes two main programs: the Short-Term Training and Placement Program (MySTEP) and the Skills Training and Enhancement Program (Upskill Malaysia) to enhance youth employability in the labor market (Ahmad, 2022). The government also focuses on talent development as a key policy under the 12th Malaysia Plan (RMK-12) (Ahmad, 2022). To further refine these efforts, the field of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) has been identified by the government as a driver of change to meet the demand for workers by existing industries. These initiatives indeed somewhat contribute to improving graduate employability. Graduates do aspire to have jobs that pay them well. However, this matter is not only viewed from that perspective but also from various other aspects such as job opportunities, employability, interest, job assurance, high salary rates, and opportunities to enhance existing skills while in the workforce (Ahmad, 2022).

Methodology

The research methodology employed in this study utilizes a descriptive research design in the form of observation and survey, aiming to elucidate a particular problem or phenomenon currently unfolding (Babbie, 2017). Furthermore, secondary sources are integrated into this study, including academic journal articles, books, and relevant websites that directly and indirectly address educational issues. Numerous data references, such as statistical data on the percentage of SPM graduates in the education system, have been consulted. Through these sources, the researcher delineates the reasons behind the emergence of the issue, proposes solutions, and outlines directions for resolving the matter. The sources utilized also engage in discussions that contribute valuable insights.

Through this method, it is possible to directly observe and conclude the steps or methods undertaken by the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE) to enhance the education system. Additionally, the research design for this case study incorporates intrinsic research, where the researcher seeks to comprehend a specific case more profoundly. This approach is undertaken to gather information and understand the factors underlying the case (Thomas, 2011). Moreover, the study takes a qualitative form, employing literature review and data importance analysis. Primary sources in this study comprise data, reports, and information obtained online. The analysis of data is conducted from journal articles, books, websites, and daily news reports published in Malaysia.

Discussion: Issues And Challenges

The findings reveal several challenges: notably low starting salaries for fresh graduates, diminishing its relevance as students prioritize independent ventures over higher education; financial struggles within families hinder educational expenses, intensified by workforce reductions affecting breadwinners; waning interest in academics drives individuals towards the workforce, underscoring the significance of education in their lives; employers emphasize work experience, impacting employment prospects. These challenges highlight intricate issues

affecting the decision-making process for recent Sijil Peperiksaan Malaysia (SPM) graduates, necessitating a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing their educational and career choices.

Issue 1: The Concept of Further Education Has Become Irrelevant

The choice between continuing education and entering the workforce has become a prominent and challenging dilemma for the youth in this era of modernity. Both options elicit varying opinions from individuals and society, whether positive or negative. However, the term "shortcoming" does not inherently imply negativity; rather, it signifies individual perspectives. One highlighted issue is the inclination of many students to opt for immediate employment instead of further education due to the perceived irrelevance of the concept of continuing education. This diminishing relevance is attributed, in part, to the exceptionally low starting salaries for recent graduates. The initial salary for graduates serves as a crucial benchmark for assessing their potential post-education. Nevertheless, a considerable number of graduates receive disproportionately low salaries that do not commensurate with their acquired knowledge. Furthermore, gender disparities persist in salary structures, with married women earning lower salaries compared to married men. The varying work culture between local and foreign IT workers receiving equal pay has also prompted in-depth investigations into this matter (Ge, Kankanhalli & Huang, 2015).

Additionally, issues such as overqualification, mismatched qualifications, and hiring decisions influenced by employer perceptions are closely linked to the perceived irrelevance of further education. In organizations heavily reliant on part-time and contingent workers, some employees may find themselves accepting positions that underutilize their skills or fall outside their areas of expertise. This discrepancy underscores the need for new graduates facing heightened labor market competition to balance their lack of work experience through continuous education, leading to a greater mismatch between acquired qualifications and actual job requirements. Ultimately, overqualification may be a long-term phenomenon cutting across gender, ethnicity, and business cycles, as individuals classified as overly qualified tend to remain in their positions for an extended period (Kulkarni, Lengnick-Hall & Martinez, 2015).

As we are aware, universities and higher education institutions predominantly emphasize knowledge-based skills rather than soft skills. Consequently, the relevance of further education diminishes because organizations prioritize individuals with soft skills over purely academic knowledge. Therefore, pursuing employment becomes the preferred choice for many, as it provides an earlier entry into the workforce, offering more opportunities to develop essential soft skills. Soft skills are now considered a pivotal factor influencing an organization's success, with organizations prioritizing them as the primary qualification for every employee.

Soft skills encompass various abilities such as teamwork, communication, leadership, customer service, and problem-solving. Moreover, the challenges faced by academics in the academic research process in universities, where the mission of academics involves training and education, research, contributing to science, supporting management, and public service (Yalçın & Altun Yalçın, 2017). However, some academics fail to perform their duties adequately for reasons such as rapid promotions within a short period in the office, a desire for universal acceptance and fame, the belief that becoming popular requires publishing more academic research and securing more funding for support, personality or personal disturbances, lack of knowledge acquired during their promotion as a scientist leading to a lack of discipline, and a limited awareness of ethics (Yalçın & Altun Yalçın, 2017). This highlights how academic

pressure can make individuals negligent in their work, showcasing that the concept of learning has become irrelevant for some, especially for organizations.

Moreover, the concept of learning is also related to integrating soft skills into courses at public universities in Malaysia (graduate perceptions). From this study, many graduates face unemployment problems due to their reluctance to work after spending years in university. Employment is one of the most crucial aspects of an individual's life, whether working independently or within an organization. Changes in the country's economy and technological sectors, such as engineering, construction, and manufacturing, have raised concerns among employers about the skills possessed by graduates, despite their qualifications in a particular field. Many employers express concern that graduates lack the necessary skills for work and exhibit low self-confidence (Halim & Sahid, 2020). Employers agree that graduates with readiness-to-work characteristics are more potential and demonstrate more satisfactory and competent results compared to those who are not prepared (Halim & Sahid, 2020).

In the era of globalization, where business plays a pivotal role in the industry, many young individuals have begun venturing into entrepreneurship and rejecting offers to continue their education for the sake of establishing their own businesses. This shift renders the concept of continuing education irrelevant in society. Most individuals, especially those still in the learning phase, are willing to forgo education in favor of striving for the advancement of their businesses (Waldemar Staniewski & Szopiński, 2015). This renders the concept of continuing education irrelevant in society. Additionally, the occurrence of "degree inflation" or an overemphasis on degrees has become prevalent. Over the past few decades, with a sudden surge in college achievements in most advanced OECD countries, a considerable number of degree holders ultimately end up working in positions previously held by less-educated workers (Sim, Ishimaru & Seki, 2015). This raises the question of whether the concept of learning is still relevant. It becomes a matter of concern and skepticism for society because possessing a degree does not necessarily guarantee a high salary or a higher-level position. In conclusion, numerous related sub-issues suggest that the concept of continuing education has become irrelevant, and it is not attributed to a single cause; rather, multiple issues support this contention.

Issue 2: Uncertain Economic Sectors Pose Challenges To Continuing Education

In navigating the currents of modernity grounded in science and information technology, education stands as a necessity for all segments of society, irrespective of age. The impact of education on various aspects of human life is profound, influencing opportunities to acquire and maintain a quality life. Education and the economy are closely interlinked components, mutually complementing each other to create an advanced and prosperous nation. Education is regarded as a continuous process in life, with diverse perspectives from scholars and an Islamic standpoint. Scholars view education as synonymous with societal understanding and the schoolteacher's perspective, aiming to nurture a generation that is intelligent and competitive. Conversely, from an Islamic viewpoint, it is about cultivating virtues and nurturing the soul, essentially producing individuals with religious integrity – faithful servants of Allah who are trustworthy and obedient to His commands (Abang Muis et al., 2021). Generally, education serves as a bridge, transporting knowledge, training, potential, interests, and all quality elements inherent in the younger generation—human capital—towards a more dynamic and progressive dimension, ultimately advancing a harmonious and prosperous nation.

Illustratively, Japan serves as a reflective example of a nation excelling in education, as evidenced by its second position in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and

Development (OECD) rankings. This ranking pertains to the education level of adults aged between 25 and 64, indicating the percentage of the population holding bachelor's or vocational skills degrees for 2 to 4 years (Abang Muis et al., 2021). Japan, once stigmatized for imperial aspirations, has transformed into a nation with a high educational standing.

Education is crucial for every segment of today's society in the age of modernity. Particularly, the younger generation should, at the very least, pursue education to the bachelor's level. However, in the current economic climate, financial challenges often impede the younger generation from continuing their education, especially at the bachelor's level. This is primarily due to financial constraints within families, with inadequate funds to cover a student's expenses. As university students, they must support their basic needs while facing high upfront costs per semester, posing a significant burden and potential detriment to academic performance. The economic uncertainty in the country, resulting in job losses due to workforce reductions, exacerbates this issue (Mohd Shah et al., 2021). Half of those affected by job losses are heads of households responsible for their children's education, including pursuing a bachelor's degree. Therefore, governmental encouragement to provide sufficient financial aid to the younger generation aspiring to continue their education but facing financial instability is imperative.

Moreover, unemployment issues deter some students from pursuing further education. The employability factor is often linked to a student's future career, shaping an individual's societal and familial status. However, rising unemployment in Malaysia leads some students to believe that pursuing education is a waste of time, foreseeing eventual unemployment due to the instability of the economic sector. Additionally, the employability of graduates, often associated with post-graduation unemployment, has been a focal point of various studies exploring the intricacies of employability issues. Government-initiated plans aim to address graduate unemployment issues, with each vying to alleviate the annual concerns faced by graduates and educational institutions. Therefore, the government must take steps to curb graduate unemployment issues, fostering an educated and competitive Malaysian populace.

Success hinges on an individual's earnest efforts to acquire knowledge beneficial for both this world and the hereafter. However, at present, over 100 million youths worldwide, especially in impoverished nations, lack access to education (Adam et al., 2022). Pervasive poverty deters many individuals from pursuing education, either due to a lack of interest or habitual exposure to hardships, rendering them unenthusiastic about entering university. This scenario is often applicable to impoverished students who lack financial resources and may have to assist their parents in earning a livelihood to supplement family income. Consequently, time for studying and completing assignments diminishes, particularly for individuals from rural communities facing difficulty accessing governmental facilities, thus potentially leading to illiteracy.

Furthermore, Digital Poverty is not exclusive to rural areas; it extends to urban areas, particularly impacting urban poor and low-income groups (Ibrahim & Othman, 2022). Digital poverty leads young generations to boredom in learning, reducing their ability to engage in other school activities. The COVID-19 pandemic has expedited the use of digital technology in teaching and learning, offering flexibility but disproportionately affecting those grappling with digital poverty. Limited financial resources, lack of knowledge, improper attitudes toward digital technology, weak determination, and difficulty accessing digital facilities all contribute to these individuals falling behind.

Digital literacy is a fundamental right for every student in this era of globalization, providing the younger generation with the tools to conduct their learning and coursework-related information searches. Additionally, digital platforms facilitate communication between the younger generation and their lecturers regarding assigned tasks. Consequently, this indirectly boosts the younger generation's enthusiasm for pursuing their studies with joy and ease. Hence, the government, particularly the Ministry of Education Malaysia, should be attentive to students' progress, ensuring that necessary facilities and assistance are provided to those in need, adhering to the proverb: "Where there's a will, there's a way."

Issue 3: Lack Of Interest in Learning as A Cause for The Young Working Class

The significance of a stable education is paramount for the younger generation and any nation. The educational sector in the country is undergoing dynamic changes and is expected to undergo numerous transformations and innovations as the 21st century approaches. The goal of making Malaysia a Center for Academic Excellence in the Asian region and internationally in the 21st century necessitates the nation to enhance the global image and quality of its education to attain the status of "World Class Education" (Othman, Mokhtar & Esa, 2022b). The achievements generated through the education system will determine the direction of the country and the lives of the younger generation in the future. Moreover, the educational process is an effective method for shaping and developing the minds, souls, and spirits towards self-discovery and achieving a well-rounded societal life.

From various perspectives, education serves as a bridge that brings knowledge, training, potential, interests, and all quality elements inherent in the younger generation, constituting human capital, to a dimension that is more dynamic and progressive for advancing a harmonious and prosperous nation. Japan and South Korea serve as exemplary cases, as these two nations, despite having minimal material assets, have successfully demonstrated that the development of a robust human capital can help advance themselves and their nations to the level of other developed countries (Othman, Mokhtar & Esa, 2022b). Twelve years ago, Gary S. Becker, the Nobel laureate in economics in 1992, emphasized that the most crucial factor in attracting foreign investment to a country lies in having an educated elite or population with high and stable education levels (Othman, Mokhtar & Esa, 2022b). The key factor is the workforce, especially those with high literacy levels, positive work culture, and the potential to acquire knowledge to develop new and creative skills.

The influence of these three elements is significant because workers who can apply a culture of knowledge and expertise in their field are the ones who will produce quality products as desired by foreign companies making investments. This is the foremost consideration and a key issue emphasized by foreign investors. The current generation in Malaysia allocates more time to schooling, approximately 11.5 years (Othman, Mokhtar & Esa, 2022b). Therefore, the current implementation of formal education by the government is commendable, as 95 percent of the country's population is literate. The increase in the number of public and private higher education institutions will further expedite the development of human capital, as an educated population with a good education is the key to shaping a developed nation in the future.

Education is highly crucial for the current generation as, with knowledge, it ensures an individual's future success. The key to success is for individuals to strive earnestly to acquire knowledge that is beneficial for both this world and the hereafter. Educated individuals can significantly contribute to their families and communities in various aspects, thereby creating a stable and stimulating society. With stable knowledge or education, the younger generation

will delve into various fields such as science, Islamic education, literature, and more. Hence, the younger generation can apply this knowledge in their daily lives. In life, problem-solving is also crucial. The younger generation can think rationally, positively, without acting hastily and panicking. Essentially, literacy is defined as the ability to read and write. The literacy rate in a country depends on the schooling acquisition of its citizens (Samian & Awang, 2017). It is stated that the higher the literacy rate, the higher the country's development. Rapid economic development is the aspiration of Malaysia and other nations to attract foreign interest. Therefore, education is a solid source of support and stability in national development.

The stability of a country's economy is closely linked to education. Knowledgeable individuals in society are more likely to become entrepreneurs, lawyers, writers, doctors, artists, engineers, or pursue their aspirations. It can also be a determinant for improving the financial fate of any nation. Additionally, individuals with higher education and diverse experiences are more likely to secure well-paying expert jobs. Studying diligently and dedicating time and effort to acquire knowledge and achieve high levels of proficiency will help the younger generation lead a comfortable lifestyle. Employers view educational experience as a significant advantage because they prefer a workforce that is responsible and knowledgeable in their organizations. Furthermore, having a high level of education or knowledge can build confidence in the current younger generation. Education is essentially a cognitive matter that can bring about changes in an individual's level of confidence. Sometimes, individuals feel ashamed due to a lack of education. The younger generation needs to step forward and embrace the benefits of education that can transform their lives with full confidence to overcome that sense of shame.

Moreover, parents play a crucial role in the younger generation's development. This is because parents serve as examples and exhibit positive attitudes to shape a successful and useful younger generation (Samian & Awang, 2017). Parents need to instill good and stable education in their children from an early age. For example, providing education to children from kindergarten to adolescence is a parental responsibility. Additionally, parents need to monitor the learning progress or lives of the younger generation regularly to ensure they are not easily influenced by actions or events that could negatively impact their education. Therefore, parents need to remain optimistic in all circumstances to ensure their children are always on the right path, subsequently producing children who maintain a positive outlook. Digital poverty also makes the younger generation easily bored with learning. This is because in this era of globalization, digital access is a fundamental right for the younger generation to conduct their studies and gather information related to coursework. Moreover, digital tools facilitate communication between the younger generation and their educators regarding assigned papers. This indirectly boosts the enthusiasm of the younger generation to continue their studies with enthusiasm and ease.

In the current wave of modernization faced by the younger generation, many of them experience unstable financial statuses, reducing their interest in learning (Alecia Puyu & Anuar, 2017; Husin, 2021). Financial issues often create pressure on the younger generation, as continuing their education requires them to meet basic needs while in university due to insufficient educational financing. Although students may not bear the same financial burdens as households with families and monthly debt repayments, it is essential to remember that being a student demands achieving academic results, not only desired by them but also by sponsors and families. Therefore, the government is encouraged to assist by providing sufficient financial aid to the younger generation who wish to pursue education but are unable due to an unstable financial status. Furthermore, difficulty in understanding lessons is also a significant

challenge for the younger generation, especially for student groups. The majority of students prefer physical learning to easily comprehend subjects. They find it easy to ask questions and engage with their lecturers or teachers. Educators, be they teachers or lecturers, must play their role in providing effective guidance to students. By offering clear explanations, this will not complicate the learning process for students.

In the effort to shape a successful and brilliant generation, universities are the primary educational platform, akin to the first step in every generation's life, to produce graduates who can make their families and nations proud (Marzuki, Abd Rahman, Kaspin, Jamal, Mohd Nor & Othman, 2021). Education plays a vital role in achieving a quality life. Education helps the younger generation build self-confidence to face the real world, enjoy the conveniences in their surroundings, and understand themselves. With good and high-quality education, the younger generation can attain high-paying jobs and advanced experiences. The changes in the education sector are integral to reinforcing national unity towards a better future because education serves as a driving force in societal formation. Emphasizing education to cultivate generations with pure values is crucial. Therefore, Malaysia's national courses from the perspective of the homeland platform are a necessity for the younger generation to cultivate collective awareness (Esa, Othman, Abu Bakar, & Mokhtar, 2021a). Additionally, the education system in Malaysia needs to adapt and apply suitable and globally aligned educational systems, staying attuned to the evolving educational landscape.

Issue 4: Insufficient Employment Assurance After Education as A Cause for Youth Hesitation To Pursue Higher Education

In contemporary times, the issue of education is no stranger to society. Among the recurring dilemmas faced by students is the decision to either pursue higher education or enter the workforce directly. This predicament often arises due to the lack of employment assurance post-education, leading the youth to fear advancing to higher academic levels. This concern is rooted in the emphasis employers place on work experience when seeking potential candidates. Major corporations, when queried about their prerequisites, consistently express a preference for candidates with substantial experience. Those with prior work experience stand a higher chance of being selected for employment compared to fresh graduates (Mohd Shah et al., 2021). Consequently, this becomes a significant challenge for young individuals contemplating further education, as their time is dedicated to learning rather than gaining practical experience. As a result, many young individuals contemplate foregoing higher education, opting to work directly, as the perceived job assurance does not significantly differ from those pursuing advanced studies.

Moreover, pursuing higher education incurs substantial costs. A majority of academically accomplished students hail from lower-income families, as evidenced by 70 percent of high-achieving STPM 2021 students belonging to the B40 income group (Ishak, 2022). This financial aspect prompts students to carefully weigh the decision to continue their education. Opting for further studies often necessitates seeking financial aid, such as loans from the National Higher Education Fund Corporation (PTPTN), which eventually translates into a debt burden upon completion of studies. While this might not pose an immediate issue for the students themselves, parents aspiring for the best for their children view PTPTN loans as future financial liabilities. Consequently, many students choose the path of immediate employment, as it proves challenging to sustain the high cost of education while in pursuit of academic endeavors. Additionally, engaging in employment offers the prospect of contributing financially to support other family members.

Furthermore, the economic downturn has significantly altered societal economic dynamics, particularly affecting those living on the margins of subsistence. This impact became especially pronounced during the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the endemic nature of COVID-19 in our country, its ramifications persist, particularly in altering contemporary work dynamics, with increased reliance on communication technologies (Mohamed, 2020). The implementation of these new work paradigms further exacerbates the urban-rural divide. Moreover, employment opportunities for graduates are increasingly constrained, primarily in professional sectors, while the percentage of graduates from semi-skilled fields continues to rise annually. This trend intensifies job competition among graduates, leading to heightened unemployment rates within the country. Consequently, this unfavorable scenario tarnishes the prospects for students aspiring to pursue university education, casting a shadow on the perceived job assurance post-graduation.

Additionally, for students fresh out of secondary school, entering the workforce often appears more enticing than continuing higher education. This allure stems from the immediate financial returns and the net income received, with minimal liabilities at that juncture, except for personal satisfaction. The perceived joys of immediate financial independence led many youths to opt for immediate employment, eclipsing their aspirations for further education. Moreover, the exigencies of life further reinforce this choice, as it relieves parents from the financial responsibility of funding higher education and underscores the responsibility to provide a better life for other family members. While the notion that money cannot buy happiness holds relevance, the absence of financial means exacerbates the hardships of contemporary life, where every essential commodity requires financial transactions. Love and affection may remain priceless, but economic stability and basic needs are imperative for sustaining life. This reality elucidates why many students opt for immediate employment post-secondary education.

Poverty is another critical factor impeding a student's intent to pursue higher education (Abdul Rashid & Samat, 2018). The poverty rate often compels youth to seek expedient ways to escape economic hardship, such as entering the workforce at a young age. Attaining secondary education alone becomes challenging for economically disadvantaged students, given the escalating costs of schooling. Numerous academically promising students in rural areas are forced to discontinue their education due to their family's economic constraints. Although the desire to pursue higher education lingers, the prevailing economic conditions prohibit its realization. Consequently, students are compelled to seek employment, with some even choosing to abandon education to assist their parents in agricultural activities. Such decisions are influenced by the perception that working as a farmer is a more viable option than facing potential unemployment after completing studies. The influx of foreign labor in Malaysia, particularly in professional fields, contributes to the displacement of local workers, leading to heightened unemployment rates. This situation renders pursuing higher education a seemingly futile endeavor, as it may culminate in unemployment. From this perspective, engaging in agricultural activities emerges as a more practical and economically viable alternative. Notably, a variety of courses are now available to enhance one's skills, irrespective of age, at more affordable costs.

The dilemma of whether to pursue higher education or enter the workforce is not unfamiliar among the youth. The pivotal factor in making this decision lies in the assurance of employment opportunities after completing education. This is particularly crucial for less privileged students who, upon completing their studies, must repay loans acquired from the National Higher Education Fund Corporation (PTPTN) (Abdul Rashid & Samat, 2018).

Instances exist where loan repayment is exempted, but only for those achieving first-class honors, excluding a significant portion of students. Furthermore, parents aspire for their children to secure lucrative employment post-graduation, thereby elevating the family's socioeconomic status. Such expectations amplify the dilemma, especially when an individual represents the sole hope of the family. The fear of disappointing loved ones intensifies this internal conflict. In conclusion, the lack of employment assurance in the job market after completing education leads many young individuals to grapple with the dilemma of choosing between pursuing higher education or entering the workforce. Consequently, it is imperative for the higher education system to consider aligning its costs with current market demands to mitigate this dilemma among students.

Conclusion: Recommendations And Future Directions

The findings reveal challenges such as notably low starting salaries affecting graduates' potential, becoming irrelevant as independent work interests surpass desires for higher education. Financial issues within families, exacerbated by workforce reductions, hinder educational expenses, while a lack of academic interest drives individuals toward the workforce. Thus, education is crucial in our lives. Work experience is emphasized by employers, impacting employment. These challenges lead the youth to prioritize work over further education. The direction concerning the issue of continuing education or entering the workforce for high school graduates is related to education, serving as a benchmark for a rapidly developing nation. However, from the perspective of the younger generation, education should be understood as an important bridge of knowledge to ensure a bright life based on intellectual, emotional, and physical skills.

Issue 1: The Irrelevance of The Continuous Learning Concept

The decision to continue education or enter the workforce has become a dilemma for some individuals, presenting challenges due to numerous obstacles and considerations involved in making such a choice. Many recent graduates from both higher education and secondary school, particularly SPM students, grapple with the uncertainty of making a sound decision—whether to immediately work to accrue experience and acclimate to the professional environment or to pursue further education due to perceived lack of experience and the belief that it is more beneficial to learn while still young. One of the issues to be discussed is that the continuous learning and working dichotomy has become a dilemma and a challenge, as perceptions abound that the concept of continuous learning has lost relevance due to various implications. For instance, university courses are criticized for their lack of alignment with contemporary civilization, and many vocational courses are being offered that prepare individuals for the workforce without the need for formal qualifications.

Former Education Minister Datuk Mohd Radzi Jidin has highlighted low wages as a barrier to continuing education, a statement reported by Astro Awani on August 7, 2022 (Che Awang, 2022). The persistently low wage rates over the years have proven to be a significant deterrent to encouraging students to pursue further education. Students are reluctant to invest time and money in education, spend four years learning, only to receive low wages that do not commensurate with the knowledge acquired (Che Awang, 2022; Wail, Ismail & Yussof, 2011). Consequently, many students lack confidence and remain confused about whether to continue their education or enter the workforce directly. Datuk Mohd Radzi also characterizes this issue as a structural problem, highlighting the stagnancy and lack of attractiveness in income and wages over the past years, given the rising cost of living and inflation rates. Graduates often perceive that, regardless of the knowledge acquired during their studies, their post-graduation

wages will remain the same as those who did not pursue further education. Some companies even offer lower salaries to graduates (Che Awang, 2022).

According to statistical data from a 2019 study, out of 560,000 SPM candidates who successfully completed the examination, only approximately 170,000 pursued higher education in institutes of higher learning, while the remaining 390,000 entered the job market directly after SPM (Che Awang, 2022). This underscores that a significant number of SPM graduates opt to work immediately rather than continue their education. In light of this, former Senior Education Minister Datuk Mohd Radzi Jidin proposed to the Federal Government to focus entirely on the development of a high-value economy. This strategic focus, he argues, could significantly contribute to higher incomes and wages among Malaysians. During the same media session, Datuk Mohd Radzi also urged the Ministry of Education to implement comprehensive training programs for teachers and school counselors to nurture students' natural interest beyond the existing school system.

For example, providing learning processes aligned with 21st-century learning methods. Furthermore, continuous monitoring of students with weak grades will help identify their weaknesses, instilling a realization of the importance of education and fostering a strong desire to continue learning after secondary school. A relevant learning concept will thus emerge as the teaching methods keep pace with contemporary advancements and the facilities available in this modern era. This not only impacts education in Malaysia but also significantly influences the country's economy, as the next generation will possess new perspectives and rational views on salary offers for fresh graduates.

Therefore, the continuous learning concept becomes irrelevant as the courses or programs offered do not meet job market demands. On September 24, 2019, public universities were mandated to conduct periodic studies to ensure program relevance and alignment with current job market needs (Sarabatin & Mohd Tuah, 2019). During the media session on that day, former Deputy Education Minister Teo Nie Ching emphasized the importance of ensuring that public universities in the country produce certified graduates with promising careers. Program relevance directly contributes to graduate employability. If the employability of a program is low, it indicates that the program needs improvement or is no longer suitable, signifying that it is a common and easily learnable course. By taking such measures, it ensures that the younger generation can easily find jobs after completing their studies. On July 17, 2022, the University of Malaya, Malaysia's top public university and the nation's oldest educational institution, discontinued at least 20 academic programs for specific reasons (Muzamir, 2022). This move was a response to low employability and the irrelevance of the offered programs. It aimed to facilitate easier career placement for graduates and prevent students from wasting time pursuing irrelevant programs (Muzamir, 2022).

Universities are also mandated to offer programs that meet industry and market demands, ensuring that university graduates are offered careers commensurate with their acquired knowledge. This raises questions about the relevance of general education subjects in enhancing national unity and identity (Othman, Esa, Abu Bakar, and Mokhtar, 2021; Esa, Ationg, Othman, Mohd Shah, Yusoff, Ramlie & Abang Muis, 2021). The University of Malaya terminated 13 programs due to low graduate numbers, while seven programs were improved and revamped. The steps taken by the University of Malaya were in line with the criteria set by the Program Sustainability Index Study (IKP) (Muzamir, 2022). Many considerations were taken into account, such as employability levels, graduate numbers, and academic programs

that were less relevant and competitive. The university's concurrent program rebranding included renaming 26 programs and merging 19 others with new names (Muzamir, 2022). In essence, four programs were retained with their existing names, and one program was based on a new model. Dr. Mohd Hamidi stated that three stages were involved in the course termination process: first, the cessation of new cohort offerings, followed by immediate freezing, and ultimately, discontinuation. Conducting periodic studies on university courses ensures the employability of graduates and the employability of IPT graduates, making the concept of learning relevant again.

Finally, the concept of continuous learning becomes irrelevant because most young people exhibit entrepreneurial traits and tend to engage in self-employment. This is due to the informal acquisition of knowledge, such as starting a business through beginner courses and reading books that provide guidance on the steps to take when initiating a business (Othman et al., 2021b). Hence, various issues contribute to the irrelevance of the continuous learning concept. Some of these issues are not inherently negative but are closely related to the civilization of the time, as well as the nature and learning desires of the students themselves.

Issue 2: Uncertain Economic Sector as A Challenge to Continuing Education

In the current era of globalization, educational issues are heavily emphasized within Malaysian society. This is because a high standard of education is deemed instrumental in producing outstanding leaders and elevating the overall quality of education within the country. As evidence, the Education Act (1996) acknowledges that "knowledge is the primary determinant of the nation's direction and the savior of the nation" (Othman, Mokhtar & Esa, 2022b). Furthermore, education plays a vital role in realizing the national vision, contributing to the attainment of a fully developed nation in terms of economic progress, social justice, and spiritual, moral, and ethical strength, towards creating a united, democratic, liberal, and dynamic society. However, due to the uncertain economy, education has become a secondary option, especially for those less privileged.

This predicament forces individuals to decide between pursuing higher education at tertiary institutions or immediately seeking employment to secure income for their livelihoods. This issue should not be trivialized by the broader society, as its implications extend beyond the less privileged, affecting the entire nation of Malaysia. Hence, various proposals have been analyzed to address this issue, including the imperative for parents to proactively create education savings or funds at an early stage. This is crucial due to economic challenges such as inflation, which is anticipated to raise the cost of higher education in the future. For instance, working parents, regardless of employment in the public or private sector, or specifically those engaged with the government or as fishermen, are encouraged and obligated to establish education funds for their children's academic pursuits. This is because tuition fees vary for each semester based on the chosen academic program.

Moreover, the government should strengthen various business assistance programs to aid entrepreneurs, as exemplified by the Selangor state government's implementation of the Program Hijrah (Dewan Selangor, 2015). This assistance is extended to small entrepreneurs engaged in activities such as snack sales, craft sales, and others with modest incomes dependent on daily sales. The program aims to enhance productivity and product marketability, making their products more recognized and in demand. Consequently, small-scale entrepreneurs can achieve higher incomes than before (Othman, Mokhtar, Maidin, and Moharam, 2021f). Evidently, the implementation of the Program Hijrah assists in improving the household

income of low-income entrepreneurs, providing a means to address economic issues and enabling them to fund their children's higher education.

In addition to the Program Hijrah, the government should provide educational sponsorships such as Technical Skills Programs through INPENS International College (Dewan Selangor, 2015). This program aids young individuals who may have missed out on higher education enrollment or come from low-income families in acquiring beneficial technical skills. These skills encompass motorcycle servicing and maintenance, electrical installation and maintenance, and other technical skills. Thus, the Technical Skills Program has proven effective in enabling low-income households in Malaysia to offer their children the opportunity to pursue education through government sponsorship.

Undoubtedly, the cost of living in Malaysia is a frequently debated issue. Therefore, the government has initiated urging citizens to collectively address this issue by utilizing local products due to their affordability and the absence of tax implications. Additionally, the Ministry of Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs must monitor and control the prices of goods in the market to alleviate the burden on the populace caused by rising prices, especially for essential commodities (Daud, 2021). Through vigilant monitoring and control, coupled with the purchase of local products, traders will become more disciplined, ultimately reducing the daily cost of living. Clearly, price control and the purchase of local products can alleviate the cost-of-living burden on society, providing households with the opportunity to save for their children's education in the future. It is hoped that these proposals can help address this issue, encouraging more young individuals to pursue higher education.

Undeniably, education is as essential as food, clothing, and shelter. Education serves as the key to an individual's success in life and acts as a benchmark for one's character. The crucial question arises: what is the direction of the education acquired? Through education, economic development can be enhanced. This is asserted because education is the key to a nation's economic progress, with educated professionals such as teachers, doctors, engineers, and others enhancing the country's image. For example, medical experts from Malaysia are sought after by international patients for treatment in the country, resulting in the influx of foreign funds and contributing to the country's economic development and positive image. Additionally, education can yield high income, as individuals with higher education qualifications, such as bachelor's or even Doctoral degrees, acquire extensive knowledge and experience, enabling them to secure well-paying jobs.

Beyond higher income, education can instill high confidence levels in individuals. Some individuals shy away from social interaction due to a lack of education, as witnessed in China, where one's societal standing is heavily influenced by educational background; those without education are often marginalized (Robst & Vangilder, 2016). With a good education, individuals can communicate and interact confidently. A prosperous nation requires knowledgeable and skilled successors; hence, prioritizing education within the country can produce a professional workforce across various sectors, aiding in national development. The mission to become an advanced nation can be realized with the emergence of skilled workers in every desired field, especially for domestic development programs, particularly in Malaysia. With a skilled workforce at home, Malaysia does not need to rely on expertise from abroad, ensuring that the planned development does not solely provide employment opportunities for foreign workers. The direction of education in Malaysia undoubtedly aims to produce credible leaders with high knowledge.

Educated leaders can contribute sound opinions and strategies in developing an advanced and peaceful nation. If an individual lacking knowledge assumes leadership of a nation, the administrative system is bound to become chaotic and mismanaged, hindering Malaysia's development and causing economic decline. Clearly, the direction of the country's education to produce authoritative and knowledgeable leaders is crucial for effective national leadership. May Malaysia become a prosperous and rapidly developing nation through increased educational rates contributing to the nation's modernization.

Issue 3: Lack Of Interest in Learning as A Cause For Young Working Adults

The era of globalization has presented numerous challenges to society, particularly to the younger generation, both in the realm of education and the workforce. Consequently, this situation places considerable pressure, especially on the younger demographic, to decide whether to pursue further education or enter the workforce at an early age. This predicament represents a dilemma and challenge for the younger generation, as the available job opportunities may not align with their educational background. As a result, they are inclined to prioritize experiential needs, engaging in the workforce or gig economy. Notably, approximately 390,000 or 72.1% of the younger generation, particularly students, opt not to continue their studies. Instead, they are more inclined to seek livelihoods in the workforce, such as becoming e-hailing drivers or delivery partners for services like "Grab," and engaging in various other occupations to avoid continuing their education (Ahmad, 2022). This decision is often driven by concerns about high living costs and annual inflation, which affect their ability to sustain basic needs like food and housing.

The younger generation is susceptible to quick influence, expressing disinterest in continuing education due to the availability of job opportunities through gig platforms (Fudzail and Nor, 2022b). They are also easily influenced by social media, perceiving that higher education does not guarantee a stable and lucrative job. This indirectly affects the mindset of the younger generation. The impact of this issue is evident as many young individuals, who possess the potential to become knowledgeable and skilled graduates, begin to fall behind in education due to unstable financial circumstances that hinder their ability to afford tuition fees (Alecia Puyu & Anuar, 2017; Husin, 2021). Additionally, there are young individuals lacking motivation to pursue education, finding it uninteresting and mundane. Some even consider continuing education a waste of time (Abdul Rahim, Azman & Mohd Majzub, 2013).

Therefore, addressing this issue is imperative to reduce its negative impact and foster a workforce of young, successful individuals in Malaysia. Several recommendations have been proposed, including the initiative by the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE) to provide quality and sufficient free education for all, regardless of race, religion, gender, or socio-economic background. The MOE could specifically target free education initiatives towards the B40 group, representing families with financially unstable income. Additionally, the government offers various incentives such as scholarships and educational aid to assist low-income families indirectly. Furthermore, teachers or lecturers play a crucial role in motivating students, especially the younger generation, who are highly influenced by their surroundings.

The traditional teaching methods employed by teachers or lecturers contribute to a lack of interest among students. Educators should adopt creative approaches in managing classes and delivering lessons. For example, they can embrace social media platforms such as TikTok, as the modern younger generation prefers using technology as a learning tool to access diverse references and information. Moreover, the MOE can collaborate with educational programs

like the Apprenticeship Program to reduce or prevent student dropouts, providing alternatives for students to continue their education beyond the academic realm.

The educational direction, guided by the National Philosophy of Education, is aimed at producing a balanced future generation. This education system fosters knowledgeable, responsible, ethical, and skilled Malaysian citizens who can contribute to society and the nation (Othman, Mokhtar & Esa, 2022b). The years from 2019 to 2021 posed challenges, marked by the Covid-19 pandemic affecting the entire population, including students. This led to changes, information technology developments, liberalization, issue diversification, and declines in various sectors, including education. The education sector was not exempt, experiencing the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, leading to university and educational institution closures (Mokhtar et al., 2021; Othman et al., 2021b).

Consequently, the government introduced alternative home-based learning methods, known as PDPR. However, this approach raised concerns about student engagement in academics, resulting in absenteeism and subsequently decreasing interest in studies, pushing students toward employment. As a result, students' academic achievements were disrupted, leading to severe emotional and mental health pressures. In determining the direction of the education system, the MOE formulated the education mission to elevate Malaysia's stature globally. Thus, the government must address this issue to safeguard students' well-being. An increase in student dropout rates can tarnish the country's education image.

Failure to manage and control the situation also leads to a loss of quality human capital, as the younger generation plays a crucial role in contributing potential excellence to the nation. Consequently, this issue negatively impacts students, particularly in terms of mental health, and can diminish their motivation for learning. Thus, this issue warrants thorough research to find effective solutions. Students need clear directions and well-planned futures. With defined goals, the younger generation can choose progressive and stable careers in the future. A lack of interest or motivation in learning leads students to enter the workforce at a young age.

Moreover, students with unsatisfactory goals may experience unstable careers due to a lack of higher qualifications (Nooriah & Zakiah, 2017). The younger generation must remember their goals and directions to avoid being swayed by contemporary influences. Clear goals will encourage students to stay motivated in their studies, irrespective of their school or university levels, ensuring stable and secure careers. Students lacking interest in learning require mental assistance. For instance, the government, schools, and universities can provide various motivational programs or directions to capture students' interest. Additionally, organizing career-related lectures and motivational sessions can contribute significantly to producing wise and successful students or graduates. Therefore, the issue of the younger generation's lack of interest in learning must be thoroughly researched to prevent the creation of students with unstable careers and unemployment issues.

With support and collaboration from all parties, especially the Ministry of Education, this issue can be avoided and minimized to produce graduates or the younger generation with successful and visionary directions. Furthermore, in managing the direction of education to shape a generation or graduates for the nation's sustainability, they must awaken from dreams and realize that there is no time for rhetoric without implementing resolutions to reality. Remember, the rise and fall of the generation in action are the most significant impact of the current generation. The contemporary generation is the driving force of the country in determining the

future. Therefore, educating the younger generation is a crucial factor contributing to the nation's largest development (Othman, Mokhtar & Esa, 2022b). Thus, the direction and foundation of the country's education are invaluable to achieve a globally competitive nation and build a first-class human capital for Wawasan 2020 Malaysia.

Issue 4: Lack of Job Assurance After Studies as A Cause for Young Individuals Fearing To Continue Their Education

The direction of examining the employability of graduates serves as a crucial reference for young individuals stepping into the realm of higher education. This endeavor is vital to enlighten students about the harsh realities of life when venturing into the professional world. Early exposure of this nature provides various benefits to young individuals, especially those aspiring to enter higher education institutions like universities. Among the advantages obtained is the ability to meticulously choose university courses based on revealed employability statistics. Consequently, the unemployment rate can be mitigated as students are well-informed about the journey they are about to embark upon, understanding whether job opportunities await them upon graduation. Every fresh graduate aspires to secure their dream job, and it is disheartening to contemplate that the expenses incurred to earn a degree might be in vain if they end up unemployed, unable to attain their envisioned careers. Such occurrences must be avoided.

Thus, through research on graduate employability, the dilemmas faced by graduates can be alleviated, simultaneously increasing the rate of educational continuation among the youth. Ultimately, the educational standards within the country will also experience growth and progress towards a more promising future.

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