The Lack of Parental Support Is a Contributing Factor to Why Adolescents in Malaysia Do Not Pursue Further Education

Ahmad Ridzuan Midan, Nor Junainah Mohd Isa

Abstract— This study was conducted to examine the extent to which the lack of parental support contributes to the decision of post-SPM adolescents not to pursue higher education at the university level. The study employs a qualitative approach using the constructivist grounded theory (CGT) method, which applies semi-structured interview techniques to collect rich data. As the study relies solely on interviews for data collection, the researcher increased the number of participants to ensure no new information was obtained to develop a substantive theory. The findings indicate that the absence of support and motivation, as well as obstacles from family, are significant factors influencing post-SPM adolescents' reluctance to continue their education. The implications of these findings can also be related to existing theories, such as Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory.

Index Terms- Qualitative, Grounded Theory, Constructivist Grounded Theory, SPM Graduates, Lack of Parental Support, Coping Strategies.

I. INTRODUCTION

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, adolescents, particularly those who have completed the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM), seem to have lost interest in pursuing higher education. They provide various reasons to avoid continuing their studies at the university level. This phenomenon is attributed to the busy work schedules of parents, leading them to neglect their responsibilities towards their children. At a young age, adolescents require guidance and positive role models. This is because they need support and encouragement from those closest to them when making significant decisions in their lives. The lack of support from close ones, especially parents, results in these individuals making decisions based on their own desires, influenced by the opinions of those around them. Therefore, the researcher is conducting this study to examine its impact on the younger generation.

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II. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

This study is conducted based on two approaches: the researcher's personal experience and observations of previous studies which indicate a lack of research in this field (Cresswell, 2005, 2018). In this study, the researcher conducted interviews with adolescents who have completed the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) and are aged 18 to 19, to explore their attitudes towards post-secondary education. Among all the questions posed, one specifically addresses the reasons why they are reluctant to pursue further education at the tertiary level. Consequently, this paper focuses solely on the factor of parental lack of support as a cause for why Malaysian adolescents do not continue their studies at the university level.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the extent to which the lack of parental support contributes to the decision of Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) graduates not to pursue higher education at the university level.

III. METHODOLOGY

The researcher employed the Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) method, applying semi-structured interview techniques to gather rich data for the development of substantive theory. Since interviews were the sole data collection method, the researcher increased the number of participants as recommended by Charmaz (2014). Moreover, studies utilizing grounded theory (GT) provide opportunities for deeper understanding through established processes (Abijo, Huzili, & Hanif, 2018; Hanif, Tengku Kastriafuddin, Zuraidi, and Nor Azmi, 2018; Voon & Amran, 2021). This, in turn, allows the researcher to interpret the meanings conveyed by the participants according to their own perspective (Nor Junainah, 2019).

According to Charmaz (2014), Charmaz and Keller (2016), Othman (2017), and Nor Junainah (2019), interview sessions should be audio-recorded, as recording allows for greater focus compared to note-taking. This ensures that all information from the study participants can be fully and accurately understood without the need to rush while taking notes. Subsequently, the researcher transcribes the interviews by listening repeatedly to ensure that no information is omitted.

Additionally, the researcher carried out all processes, starting from constructing the questions, conducting the interviews, transcribing, coding, writing memos, performing theoretical sampling, developing the theory, drafting, and finally writing the final report.

Participants

The participants involved in this study are individuals aged 18 to 19 years who have completed the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM). The researcher employed a combination of convenience sampling, purposive sampling, snowball sampling, theoretical sampling, and theoretical group interviews to recruit the study participants.

Data Analysis

The researcher applied initial coding and focused coding methods to analyze the study data, as recommended by Charmaz (2006, 2014), Saldana (2013), and Nor Junainah (2019). The process of initial coding involved reading the transcripts line by line and word by word to classify information into smaller components that formed initial codes. Additionally, the researcher utilized ATLAS.ti software to assist in refining, consolidating, deleting, and organizing these initial codes (Susanne Friese, 2012). Once the initial codes were identified, the researcher reviewed them to perform focused coding, which involves identifying primary codes based on their frequency of occurrence in the data (Charmaz, 2006, 2014).

Focused coding involves a detailed analysis of the relationships between each code to form subcategories and categories (Charmaz, 2006, 2014, 2016). Once the main categories were successfully identified, the researcher aimed to identify themes by examining the relationships between the formed categories. Theoretical sampling was conducted after the categories were established until theoretical saturation was achieved. According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), constant comparison is performed continuously to compare codes with codes, codes with categories, categories with categories, and categories with concepts, in order to develop inductive and abductive theories based on the research data until saturation is reached. Furthermore, during the data coding process, the researcher recorded memos by writing informal notes to elaborate on the processes, assumptions, and actions classified within specific categories, as suggested by Nor Junainah (2019). Examination of the relationships between themes allowed the researcher to highlight substantive theories and propose a theoretical model.

IV. RESEARCH FINDINGS

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher observed that the demotivation or barriers faced by adolescents in pursuing higher education stem from a lack of support and encouragement from their families, which has led to decreased interest in furthering their studies. A significant number of participants indicated that the primary reason for their reluctance to continue their education is the absence of support and encouragement from their parents to pursue university education.

Furthermore, there are also adolescents around the age of 12 who do not continue their education to the secondary level. This phenomenon is associated with a lack of parental attention or supervision regarding their children's educational progress, as observed by the researcher.

Additionally, the attitude of the family in not allowing them to pursue their studies plays a significant role. The adolescents interviewed expressed feelings of pressure due to their circumstances. A small number of participants reported feeling stressed upon realizing that their parents did not permit them to continue their education at the university level, despite achieving commendable results. This situation has also contributed to an increase in the unemployment rate in Malaysia.

Furthermore, one participant stated that his father did not allow him to pursue higher education. This was due to his father's belief that success can be achieved even by assisting the family. This factor has also been identified as one of the primary reasons why high school graduates are reluctant to continue their studies.

Nevertheless, there were also participants who reported facing opposition and persuasion from close family members not to pursue higher education. Various reasons were provided to ensure that these individuals did not continue their studies at university. For example, they stated that the duration of study required is too long and that they would be burdened with education loan debts. Such circumstances have led these individuals to decide to continue working and abandon their aspirations for further education.

Furthermore, there were participants who indicated that their decision not to pursue further education was due to the illness of their parents. This situation compelled them to care for their parents at home, which, in turn, hindered their ability to continue their studies at a higher level.

Figure 1 provides a concise overview of the factors that contribute to adolescents' reluctance to pursue further education.
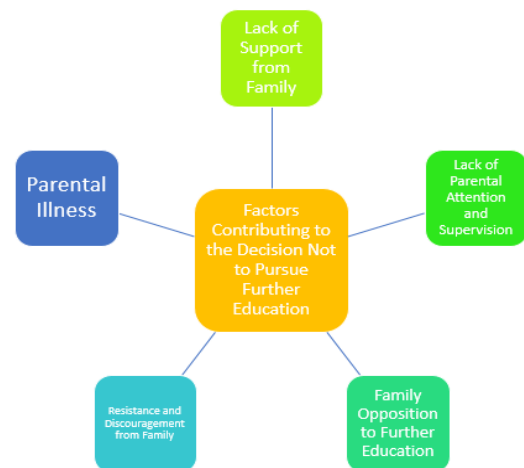

Figure 1: Factors Contributing to the Decision Not to Pursue Further Education

V. DISCUSSION

Demotivation is a primary barrier preventing adolescents from pursuing higher education at the university level, which may stem from influences such as parents, peers, or social media. One of the main factors obstructing their continuation of studies is financial instability, leading to a lack of parental support for university education. This finding aligns with studies by Saxena and Maithly (2008), Pillay et al. (2022), and Refaeli et al. (2023), which indicate that female students are often impeded from advancing to university. Additionally, there is encouragement to assist parents on farms or in family businesses as an alternative means of contributing to the family income, as noted by Zishiri et al. (2021). The distance from family members also serves as a reason why adolescents reject opportunities to pursue university education (Abdul Latif, Salma, Ali, & Sabariah, 2016; Sabariah & Siti Khadijah, 2017; Alias, Shafizza & Noor Atikah, 2017).

Furthermore, these findings can be related to the educational background of the majority of the Malay community, which often lacks comprehensive educational attainment (Chamburi Siwar, 2008). Most individuals only manage to complete their education at a minimal level. This phenomenon is attributed to the poverty faced by the Malay community, which forces them to neglect education. Such circumstances profoundly impact their children's education, as they perceive higher education as a waste of time and money. They instill the value of seeking financial resources in their children to cope with the economic instability of the country. Consequently, this affects the quality of education received and results in a loss of skilled and expert manpower in the future. Moreover, it may lead to a shortage of knowledgeable and ethical leaders capable of effectively leading the country.

Moreover, the findings of this study can also be related to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, specifically at the third level, which pertains to love and belonging. The need for love, as proposed by Maslow, is crucial for fostering a close relationship between parents and their children. According to Maslow's theory, an individual must first satisfy their physiological needs, such as food and water. This is because if adolescents do not have adequate food resources, it will adversely affect their learning process in the classroom (Nor Nazimi, Jaffary & Aminudin, 2017). Once their physiological needs are met, they require a safe and secure environment provided by their parents and family members to ensure they are protected from any issues. The sensitivity and concern of parents for their children's safety can further enhance the motivation and confidence of these individuals to pursue their goals, particularly in continuing their education. Consequently, this can lead to a heightened sense of self-love within them (Neff, 2003a; 2008; Nor Junainah & Ab. Aziz, 2009).

In addition to Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, the researcher has linked the study findings with Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory introduced by Urie Bronfenbrenner. The researcher found that the obtained results can be associated with the microsystem level of this theory, which involves the immediate environment surrounding the children for direct interaction with their closest individuals, such as parents and family members. The researcher contends that parental support and encouragement, along with the influence of close family members, are key elements for these high school graduates in making decisions. This assertion is based on the premise that if issues arise within this cycle, problems in the decision-making process are also likely to occur. For instance, these high school graduates may make unexpected decisions. Such occurrences typically happen due to the varying influences of their surrounding environment.

In summary, high school graduates are a group that requires support from all parties, particularly parents and family members, to gain the motivation and encouragement needed to pursue further education. Therefore, strategies to address this issue must be implemented by responsible parties to ensure that these adolescents do not fall behind in their education, which could result in a loss of skilled manpower for the country.

VI. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study was conducted to examine the extent to which the lack of parental support leads high school graduates to refrain from pursuing university education. The study employed the Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) method, culminating in the development of a substantive theory based on the information gathered from participants. This substantive theory is a minor theory focused on high school graduates of the Malaysian Certificate of Education (SPM). Additionally, the researcher utilized in-depth interview techniques to facilitate the exploration of the participants' thoughts, feelings, and responses through the posed questions. The face-to-face interview sessions also allowed the researcher to focus more on the behaviors and expressions of the participants. As interviews were the sole data collection method, the researcher increased the number of study participants. The findings indicate that the lack of support and motivation, along with barriers encountered from the family, leads these high school graduates to be reluctant to continue their education.

Therefore, the findings of this study and the developed substantive theory can serve as important references and guidance for the Ministry of Education Malaysia, the Ministry of Higher Education, schools, teachers, and parents. Overall, this study addresses the research question that without encouragement and support from their families, these adolescents are unlikely to pursue their education at the university level. Furthermore, this situation can have profound effects on the individuals themselves, their families, their religion, and the nation.

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Co- Author Contribution

All listed members have provided significant contributions in assisting the Researcher to complete this study directly.