Pertanika J. Soc. Sci. & Hum. 33 (2): 711 - 734 (2025)

PERTANIKA JOURNALS

SOCIAL SCIENCES & HUMANITIES

Journal homepage: http://www.pertanika.upm.edu.my/

Breaking the School-to-Jail Pipeline in Malaysia: Challenges in Leading a Horse to Water and Drink for Itself

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ABSTRACT

This study extensively examines the education of incarcerated youth at Henry Gurney School, aiming to comprehend prevalent challenges and propose forward-thinking improvements to the current system. While institutionalisation is recognised for its role in curbing misbehaviour, persistent concerns revolve around its potential to displace and reinforce disruptive behaviour among young convicts, posing enduring threats to social security. The research underscores critical issues by employing a comprehensive approach involving interviews, observation, and archival data analysis: A shortage of qualified personnel, collaboration between government and private sectors, and the importance of creating conducive spaces for education and vocational training. The study accentuates the urgent need for concerted efforts from various stakeholders to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline, thereby reducing recidivism among youth in Malaysia. The implications for theory and practice underscore the imperative for educational programs that nurture independent, self-motivated individuals striving for personal improvement.

Keywords: Challenges in rehabilitation, correctional institution, delinquency, ethnography, Henry Gurney School, incarcerated youth education, school-to-prison pipeline

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received: 24 January 2024
Accepted: 12 December 2024
Published: 30 April 2025

DOI: https://doi.org/10.47836/pjssh.33.2.10

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INTRODUCTION

An essential aspect of rehabilitating convicted child offenders is an excellent intervention and re-education programme that could reduce recidivism (Abrams & Franke, 2013; Awal et al., 2021; Chung et al., 2011; Hashim et al., 2019; Hussin, 2007; Iwatsuki, 2019; Kennedy, 2013; Little, 2015; McCray et al., 2018; Miyaguchi et al., 2012; Nicklin, 2017; Pauzi et al., 2016; Rafedzi & Abrizah, 2016; Reed & Wexler, 2014;

e-ISSN: 2231-8534

Sander et al., 2011; Schaeffer et al., 2014; Strnadová et al., 2017; Taib, 2012). The Malaysian Penal Code and the Malaysian Child Act (2001) govern children's criminal acts in Malaysia. Based on these legal decrees, a 'child' is those below the age of 18, and if arrested, detained, and tried for any offence, they will not be subjected to the standard legal procedures applicable to adults (Hassan et al., 2020; Hussin, 2007; Nong & Yusoff, 2015, 2019; Rahim et al., 2015; Ramli, 2021; Samuri et al., 2013). Under the ruling and jurisdiction of the Court for Children (Md Salleh, 2007; Rahim et al., 2015; Ramli, 2021; Samuri et al., 2013), convicted child offenders can be sent to a prescribed rehabilitation institution, either to a closed institution, such as Henry Gurney School (HGS) or Approved Schools under the administration and management of the Prisons Department or an open institution, such as probation hostels (for example, *Asrama Akhlak)* or places of refuge (for example, *Taman Seri Puteri*) under the Department of Social Welfare (Nong & Yusoff, 2015, 2019; Samuri et al., 2013; Taib, 2012).

In addition, the two legal documents also mandated the rights of convicted children to obtain appropriate access and support facilities to national education and training. The law is as required and stipulated by international conventions such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (C.R.C.), United Nations Basic Principles for the Treatment of Prisoners, Beijing Rules, Mandela Rules, and United Nations Rules for the Protection of Juveniles Deprived of their Liberty (J.D.L.) to guarantee their sustenance after they have completed their sentence (Awal et al., 2021; Hussin, 2007; Md Salleh, 2007; Pauzi et al., 2016; Tharshini et al., 2021). The responsibility is shouldered by various related departments, including the Prisons Department, the Department of Social Welfare, and the Ministry of Education, to meet these standards. These departments provide ample educational opportunities and support for institutionalised children and young people in Malaysia, enabling them to be better individuals after release (Taib, 2012). Within the interest of this study, there are currently three HGS in Malaysia, namely HGS Telok Mas, Melaka, HGS Kota Kinabalu, Sabah (Girls), and HGS II Keningau, Sabah, and HGS Puncak Borneo Siburan, Sarawak under the management of the Prisons Department, Malaysia (PDM; Ariffin & Zailani, 2021).

Questions remain if child offenders sent to rehabilitation institutions are in danger of being sidelined from acquiring comprehensive academic education as they are isolated from schools, families, and communities where they can find support for success (Van Vleet, 1999; Leone & Cutting, 2004). Based on data from the Department of Statistics Malaysia (Table 1), many cases involving children have been observed from 2014 until 2019. The increase in re-offending cases that may undermine the current educational approaches currently enforced at institutions responsible for rehabilitating these young people is alarming. Studies by Dawkins and Sorensen (2015) and Amani

et al. (2018) warn that residential placement may not effectively reduce recidivism while aggravating more violent offences among institutionalised young offenders. Although the numbers suggest a small number of recidivists among convicted children, the rising trend indicates the emergence of the 'school-to-prison pipeline' (James, 2011; Seroczynski & Jobst, 2016; Wald & Losen, 2003) in Malaysia. Furthermore, recent studies have confirmed the worrying situation of juvenile uprising cases. Rahim et al. (2015) reported that based on police statistics, a whopping 57% increase in cases involving children from 2012 to 2013 had been recorded. Another study mentioned a cumulative growth of 30.8% in cases involving children from 2009 to 2013 (Pung et al., 2015). The increase can be further linked to the surging number of young individuals locked at institutions under the Malaysian Prison Department from 2015 until 2019 (Table 2).

According to Budin (2014), less is known about such institutions in Malaysia as they are well-guarded and secluded from the general population. The absence of a strategic plan at a national level to accommodate these juveniles in the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013–2025 is tangible evidence that the education issue for juveniles has often been controversial and neglected by the larger education community (Leone & Cutting, 2004). Focusing more on the 'normal' students, those deemed "uneducable," a social label described by Brewer et al. (1998) as being "hopeless and helpless" for their involvement in social problems, are at risk socially, emotionally, psychologically, and only obtain inadequate educational opportunities (McCray et al., 2018). Consequently, very little is known about the challenges faced by rehabilitation institutions in Malaysia that underpin a successful academic-based rehabilitation process.

Researchers in Malaysia have yet to treat education for incarcerated children in detail. Taib (2012) argued that empirical

Table 2
Young individuals locked at institutions under the management of the Malaysian Prison Department (2015-2019)

	HGS	RC
2015	1,146	1,361
2016	1,140	1,434
2017	1,292	1,889
2018	1,417	1,971
2019	1,569	2,268

Note. HGS = Henry Gurney School; RC = Rehabilitation Centres

Table 1
Number of cases involving children in Malaysia (2014-2019)

	2014*	2015*	2016	2017*	2018*	2019*
First offence	4725	4152	n/a	4952	4619	4248
Repeated offence	371	417	n/a	491	675	585
Total	5096	4569	n/a	5443	5294	4833

Note. *Department of Statistics Malaysia; n/a = Not Available

studies investigating the challenges faced by the PDM in implementing educational programmes within prison institutions in Malaysia are still lacking. Research on the subject has been mostly restricted to limited comparisons of the legal aspects of children in conflict with the law (Samuri et al., 2013), the physical and psychological impact of incarceration (Nasir et al., 2010), factors influencing the effectiveness of rehabilitation programmes (Hassan & Mokhtar, 2018; Mohammad & Azman, 2018), constraints in delivering good educational programmes (Rafedzi & Abrizah, 2016), and alternative rehabilitation or educational approaches that could be used at rehabilitation institutions (Azam et al., 2021). Topics less prominently discussed in the correctional education research literature include a holistic curriculum integrating general academic, vocational, life-skill, health, and interpersonal learning.

Nong and Yusoff (2015, 2019) maintained that Malaysian legislators' approaches to juvenile justice seemed to prioritise punitive measures compared to restorative justice or diversion alternatives such as supervision, family-based care, or being placed under the care of a fit person, thus endangering the children's future. Nevertheless, this practice is not isolated only to Malaysia but is also evident worldwide (Atilola, 2013; Van Vleet, 1999). Several studies have suggested institutionalisation is the most effective approach for preventing future misbehaviour. This method isolates individuals from harmful external influences and enhances self-control through the disciplinary and spiritual programs offered at the rehabilitation institution (Nong & Yusoff, 2019; Ramli, 2021; Samuri et al., 2013). The institution placement may further displace these young convicts, reinforce their disruptive behaviour, and endanger the nation's social security in the long run (Hashim et al., 2019; Nong & Yusoff, 2019).

Considering the abovementioned limitations, the present study examined the existing practice in educating incarcerated children at HGS Telok Mas, Melaka (HGSTM). Suggestions and recommendations have been proposed for the improvements needed to minimise the number of dropouts by focusing on the educational challenges the institution faces, thus promoting positive social reintegration among incarcerated children. Hence, the study addresses the following questions:

(a) How are children in conflict with the law being educated at HGSTM?
(b) What are the current educational challenges that HGSTM is facing?
(c) How can the current educational approach at HGSTM be further improved?

As this study focuses on child offenders under PDM management, the discussion is limited to PDM and HGSTM. The outcome of this study may play an essential role in developing committed human capital that decreases the number of crimes and recidivism, thus improving society's quality of life.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Rehabilitation Theory: Serving Juvenile Learners

'Rehabilitation' implies the process of returning to a healthy or good way of life or the process of helping an individual through training and therapy to combat misbehaviour, addiction, or severe mental illness. In other words, any rehabilitation setting is purposely directed towards 'change,' an improvement in the participant's condition due to an intervention (Dvir, 2015). Any academic programme within a correctional facility then serves as one aspect of a rehabilitation programme directed at improving a child offender's behaviour, life skills, ability to obtain and secure livelihood and prevent recidivism (Azam et al., 2021; Bell et al., 2016; Blomberg et al., 2012; Grenier, 1967; Hassan et al., 2020; Hussin, 2007; Kremer & Vaughn, 2019; Leone & Cutting, 2004; Leone & Wruble, 2015; Nurse, 2013; Pauzi et al., 2016; Rafedzi & Abrizah, 2016; Taib, 2012; Wan-Mohamed & Yunus, 2009) that focuses on two elements: rehabilitation and reintegration (De Ruigh, 2019; Samuri et al., 2013).

Experts and researchers globally have determined that several factors which influence successful educational intervention are:

(i) Programme executioner skills and attitude (Blomberg et al., 2012; Hassan et al., 2020; Mohammad & Azman, 2018; Ng et al., 2012; Pauzi et al., 2016; Someki & Allen, 2021; Taib, 2012; Wan-Mohamed & Yunus, 2009)

(ii) Student's age and criminal background (Hassan & Mokhtar, 2018; Leone & Cutting, 2004)

(iii) Systematic curriculum and well-managed teaching and learning processes (Azam et al., 2021; Pauzi et al., 2016)

(iv) Continuous inter-agencies and management support (Pauzi et al., 2016; Taib, 2012),

(v) Proper and well-equipped facilities (Rafedzi & Abrizah, 2016)

(vi) Offenders' readiness to engage in changes that will reduce their risk of re-offending (Anstiss et al., 2011)

A particular advantage of formal education delivered within a correctional institution is the constant supervision that impedes child offenders' tendency to repeat criminal offences (Fischer & Argyle, 2018). A study by Blomberg et al. (2012) suggested the positive impact of a well-structured academic programme on child offenders' motivation to continue their studies post-release. In contrast, poor programmes might be a reason for ineffective rehabilitation programmes, leading to lower deterrence (Ng et al., 2012).

Nevertheless, these factors also revealed several serious drawbacks. Nurse (2013) and Wald and Losen (2003) reasoned that child offenders frequently hailed from the vulnerable section of society and were forced to work to assist their families, leading them to drop out of school due to poor academic performance. Consequently, these child offenders have been denied educational opportunities, making them feel

insignificant (Grenier, 1967) and putting them on a course of self-doubt and failure (Nurse, 2013). Moreover, imprisonment offers no solution to the situation. Some may miss school days due to court appearances and poor re-entry preparation programmes that ultimately end with them dropping out of school (Wald & Losen, 2003). Others question the effectiveness of academic programmes within correctional facilities due to poor management and the lack of connections between public schools and the corrective education programme (Leone & Cutting, 2004; Nurse, 2013). Leone and Cutting (2004) stated that juvenile correctional institutions could not deliver effective educational-based programmes due to limited space, overcrowding, lack of funding, and unqualified education officers. Additionally, the youth may enter the institution with limited academic qualifications, behaviour problems, and substance abuse issues that may impede any educational-based intervention.

The situation is further aggravated by the decline in traditional socialising agents, such as religion and family, fuelling child offenders' violent behaviour (Sharpe, 2009). In other words, instead of providing an educational programme offering the opportunity to change their lives, the available system unintentionally produces angrier individuals who are more demotivated to learn from where they started, intensifying their probability of committing a crime in the future. This possibility is a reality as Nasir et al. (2010) found that some juvenile delinquents suffer from cognitive distortion, leading them to rationalise their delinquent behaviour as acceptable and rational. Resultantly, the system's expected modification of behaviour has fuelled these child offenders to be more aggressive. For example, Hassan and Mokhtar (2018) conducted a study involving 289 respondents from eight juvenile rehabilitation institutions in Malaysia and found that the spread of bullying in juvenile rehabilitation centres is alarming. Their study determined that at least 95% of trainees had engaged in bullying behaviour and became victims of bullying within a month of entry. Child offenders typically display low self-acceptance and emotional awareness, struggle with emotion control and motivation, and are often influenced by poor stress management, a weak grasp of religious teachings, and peer encouragement to persist in misdemeanours (Mustafa et al., 2017). In addition, Wan-Mohamed and Yunus (2009) further argued that child offenders' involvement and achievement in educational programmes are average. The condition could have resulted from disrupted teaching and learning processes, inability to attend class due to court proceedings, and understaffing of teachers and personnel, leading to low academic achievement in national examinations.

Rehabilitation Through Education at HGSTM

The first youth rehabilitation institution was established in 1948 in Muar Johor Prison, known as the "*Sekolah Pemulihan Lanjutan*." The school was relocated to

Telok Mas Melaka as a Youth Training School in 1950 and changed for the third time to Henry Gurney School on May 15th, 1950 (Hassan & Mokhtar, 2018). Since its inception by the British administration, the school has been designed to rehabilitate and reform young people who have committed moral offences. At the time, modules were based on the Borstal System, an English reformatory system designed for youths between 16 and 21, focusing on routine, discipline, and authority (Ariffin & Zailani, 2021). Under the plan, residents were placed under the close supervision of a housemaster or housemistress and the house staff, a practice still evident today. The Borstal System was later replaced with the Henry Gurney School Regulations 1949, which remains applicable under the Rehabilitation and Treatment Division (Ariffin & Zailani, 2021; Awal et al., 2021; Hashim et al., 2019).

The unit is responsible for formulating, designing, and implementing systematic, well-organised, and well-balanced rehabilitation programmes for incarcerated individuals in all correctional institutions in Malaysia (Taib, 2012). HGSTM is "the final" institution any child offenders can enter before being sent to the adult prison, as no permanent criminal record shall be registered and kept after release. This concept is a real-life Batman's 'clean slate programme' where each resident is given a last golden ticket to transform their life. As HGSTM's goal is not to punish but to educate, child offenders within the facility are referred to as 'residents' and not 'inmates,' even though strict prison rules still apply. The treatment these 'residents' receive is substantially more positive—staff are required to build relationships with the residents, engaging in regular conversations, offering nurture and motivation to foster good conduct, and aiming for continuous improvement. Residents are accommodated in dormitories under a housemaster's or housemistress's supervision, not in cells. The facility aims to prevent return visits by providing as many residents as possible with adequate education and vocational training.

These positive reinforcement practices at the facility are deliberate to defuse stigmatisation and negative labelling that may affect child offenders' self-respect and self-value. As most child offenders come from underprivileged families and drop out of school due to personal circumstances (Nurse, 2013; Wald & Losen, 2003), the institution proactively combats insecurities and improves the child offenders' self-identity and self-worth with such practice. Furthermore, HGSTM, as a correctional entity, is responsible for guaranteeing the safe custody and rehabilitation of its residents (Pauzi et al., 2016; Taib, 2012). As mentioned earlier, child offenders are treated differently and can never be placed under the same roof as adult offenders to avoid negative influence, trauma, or being bullied by adult prisoners (Md Salleh, 2007; Rahim et al., 2015). As a result, no adult inmates could be found within the compound and female child offenders were separated and placed entirely away from their counterparts, while newly admitted

child offenders were housed away from their 'seniors' during the early stage.

The PDM prepares the "Putra Module," a specific rehabilitation programme designed for child offenders in the HGSTM and other prison institutions (Taib, 2012). Under this module, the child offenders are equipped with various academic, vocational, spiritual, sports, and co-curricular activities. The Putra Module involves four phases: Orientation, Character Strengthening, Skills Development, and Pre-release (Ariffin & Zailani, 2021; Bidin et al., 2008; Budin, 2014; Hashim et al., 2019; Taib, 2012). Each of these phases serves a different purpose. Nevertheless, the overall objectives are set towards correcting and restoring or reinforcing positive morale, combating illiteracy, providing education opportunities, inculcating the culture of lifelong learning, and convincing the residents that education can change their lives to ensure that they can be returned to society as responsible and productive individuals (Ariffin & Zailani, 2021; Bidin et al., 2008; Budin, 2014; Hashim et al., 2019). According to Samuri et al. (2013), child offenders sent to HGS must continue their education under a general school system, remedial education (essential reading, writing), or vocational training. The list of the academic and vocational training available at the institution is shown in Table 3.

This finding supports the positive effect of institutionalisation (Nong & Yusoff, 2019; Ramli, 2021; Samuri et al., 2013), where the residents are getting the necessary push to get back on track with their education. Nevertheless, as this study precedes, other compounding issues require immediate attention to improve the delivery of the education-based programmes at SHGTM.

METHODS

Mini-ethnography Approach

This study adopted a mini-ethnographic approach, which, despite its brief duration, aligns with traditional ethnographic methodologies by focusing intensely on specific aspects of cultural practices within constrained timeframes (Fetterman, 2019).

Table 3
Academic and vocational track at HGSTM

Academic Track	Religious Class	Vocational Track
3M (literacy classes for reading, writing and arithmetic) remedial classes (Sijil Persekolahan Malaysia/ Grade 11) Classes (equivalent to GCE O level)	Halaqah Module (for Muslims): The study of Aqeedah, Fiqh, Recitation of the Qur'an, Tafsir, Hadith, and Sirah Morale Module (for non-Muslims): Morals and Human Welfare	Sewing Crafting Bakery Canteen Kitchen Music/Orchestra/Brass-Band Automotive Welding Bakery Craft Wall-packing

This method was particularly suited to the aims of our study, which investigated the challenges faced by institutions implementing incarcerated youth education within a juvenile correctional facility. The chosen duration of 14 days, constrained by heightened security concerns and the spread of COVID-19, was considered sufficient to obtain meaningful insights within this specific context (Hammersley, 2006). Ethnography, as defined by Hughes (1997), is "the art and science of describing a group or culture" (p. 18), and it was employed due to its capacity to provide deep understanding from the perspectives of different stakeholders in their natural settings. This approach enabled the gathering of 'thick data' through various means such as interviews, observations, and document analysis, which is critical for understanding the complexities of juvenile correctional education (Helfenbein et al., 2011; Van Maanen, 2011). Despite the brief fieldwork period, the intensive engagement provided sufficient depth to capture the holistic 'story' of educational practices and challenges within the correctional setting, maintaining the integrity of ethnographic inquiry (Atkinson, 2015; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

Following the principles of ethnography, this study delved into the cultural dynamics of a juvenile correctional facility to identify the challenges the institution faces in rehabilitating its residents. The research effectively captured etic and emic perspectives by focusing on beliefs, language, behaviours, and prevalent issues such as power dynamics, resistance, and dominance (Atkinson, 2015; Fetterman, 2019). The etic perspective provided an analytical view of the institutional strategies and rehabilitation programs. At the same time, the emic approach allowed for a deeper insight into the residents' personal experiences and perceptions, revealing how these elements influence their rehabilitation process (Harris, 1976; Pike, 1967). This dual approach was pivotal in uncovering the subtle yet significant cultural interactions that shape rehabilitation outcomes, emphasising how language and behavioural norms within the facility both challenge and facilitate the process of cultural adaptation and identity reconstruction among the youth (Geertz, 1973). The study's focus on these ethnographic elements facilitated a comprehensive understanding of the institutional and cultural barriers to effective rehabilitation.

Ethical Considerations

In conducting this study, comprehensive ethical considerations were implemented to safeguard the anonymity and well-being of those involved, who are recognised as vulnerable participants. Ethical clearance was obtained from the university's Centre for Research and Innovation Management (approval number 02/2019, on March 21st 2019) before the commencement of the study, ensuring all research protocols met the required ethical standards. Additionally, all research materials, including semi-structured interview questions, were submitted to the Prison Department to

secure permission for entry, further aligning the study with institutional regulations and ethical guidelines (Israel & Hay, 2006). Before any interviews, participants were thoroughly briefed on the study's objectives, their rights to anonymity, and their ability to withdraw from the study at any point without consequences. This briefing was part of an ongoing informed consent process meticulously documented and monitored (Mertens & Ginsberg, 2009).

Population, Sample, and Sampling Technique

The study employed criterion sampling to ensure that the selected participants experienced the studied phenomenon. As the researchers do not have access to the list of names of those to be included in the study, "[c]riterion sampling worked well when all individuals studied represent people who have experienced the phenomenon" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 157). Hence, the population selected for this study were the residents, security officers, academic teachers, and the management personnel of HGSTM. In total, 27 people were included in this study. Their distribution is described in Tables 4 and 5.

Archival Data

This study included archival data, annual reports, research papers, and official data and documents provided by numerous government agencies. This type of data is an essential source of information. It offers a valuable comparison for checking the truthfulness and accuracy of 'stories' presented by participants during the interview sessions (Hughes, 1997).

Observations

In this study, the researchers' role as 'observer participants' varied depending

Table 4
Distribution of gender

Phase	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
Early	3	0	3
Middle	4	2	6
Final	3	2	5

Table 5
Population roles

Roles	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
Administrator/Policymakers	3	0	3
Students	4	2	6
Staff*	3	2	5

Note. *Security Officers/Academic Staff/Workshop Instructors

on activity type and its implications on the data (Hughes, 1997). Overall, the observations focused on the two curricula: the academic curriculum and the vocational training implemented at HGSTM. With the school's management granting permission, five observation sessions were conducted over the two weeks. The approach outlined by Helfenbein et al. (2011) was adopted—a "nonintrusive, hands-off, eyes-on" method with no active participation in the activities—to gain a first-hand, inside perspective and a quick understanding of the events. During each session, detailed notes were taken and reflected upon after each observation.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with residents, security officers, academic teachers, and top management personnel. According to Hughes (1997), interviews with people from different departments and organisational levels are essential to ensure a broad range of perspectives. Twenty-seven interviews were conducted on-site and lasted approximately thirty minutes to two hours. Each discussion followed a semi-structured protocol. Some questions were directed towards gaining the residents' awareness of educational opportunities provided at the facilities, tapping into the experiences of teachers and personnel, and identifying challenges faced in delivering academic-based programmes. A few personnel were encouraged to discuss their thoughts and gauge their perceptions of the education system. Due to strict security and confidentiality concerns, no recording devices were permitted beyond the school's gate. As a result, the researchers depended entirely on rigorous note-taking, while a small portion of the interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim as they were conducted off-site.

Data Analysis

In this ethnographic study, we employed a culturally responsive inductive analysis to meticulously explore and interpret the cultural dimensions influencing the rehabilitation programs within the juvenile correctional facility. Our analytical approach was structured around Geertz's (1973) concept of thick description, which involves detailed accounts of field experiences to capture the deep meanings and social interactions within the culture-sharing group. By integrating interviews, observations, and archival data, we achieved methodological triangulation, enhancing the credibility and depth of our findings. Each researcher independently analysed the interview transcripts, focusing on identifying cultural themes such as beliefs, practices, power dynamics, resistance, and expressions of identity that are pivotal in rehabilitation. These themes were then collaboratively refined and cross-validated through extensive team discussions, ensuring they resonated with the observed behaviours and documented institutional practices. The dependability and confirmability of our findings were rigorously maintained through an audit trail involving a detailed review of all data sources and the decision-making processes underlying theme development

(Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The refined themes were further assessed against the backdrop of existing literature and secondary data, ensuring they provided a comprehensive explanation of the challenges faced by the facility and aligned with the broader ethnographic discourse on rehabilitation in correctional settings. This methodological rigour allowed us to confidently assert that our conclusions authentically represent the institution's rehabilitation program's cultural underpinnings and operational challenges.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Challenge 1: The Security vs Rehabilitation Conundrum

As a correctional facility under the management of the PDM, HGSTM faces a unique cultural challenge in managing its residents. Two divergent and conflicting discourses emerged: the management's competing interest in maintaining safe custody while delivering an effective rehabilitation programme. One of the personnel mentioned that:

> *There is a vast difference between managing 'security' and 'rehabilitation.' Regarding security, the ratio between the wardens and residents would be 1 to 2. Still, in rehabilitation situations, the balance could be 1 to 10 or maybe 30 residents. You must understand the differences between the two; activities that involve 'security' may include patrolling, accompanying residents to the court hearing, bringing them to the hospital for treatment, and monitoring residents' movement from one end to the other. 'Rehabilitation' would include attending academic classes, religious education, workshops, or joining group counselling. So, as you can see, the number of personnel present at one time differs significantly depending on the nature of the situation.*

A significant output for this competing scenario would be the institution's priority, a finding similar to the research by Someki and Allen (2021). The interviews with the teachers and workshop trainers revealed a similar theme where the school's educational mission was not 'seen' necessarily prioritised by the management. Nevertheless, the researchers deduced that the conflict is a high priority due to the lack of consideration of the fundamental difference between 'security' and 'rehabilitation.' For example, during the observation, there were instances where workshops were closed as wardens, who are also workshop instructors, were scheduled for security activities such as accompanying residents to court hearings. Hence, security was the priority in the situation, whereas rehabilitation became second. One way to overcome this issue is by dedicating the availability of personnel for one specific task rather than one person tasked with different roles and responsibilities at the institution. This unfortunate scenario may result in unwanted negativity among the teachers and workshop instructors as they may perceive their position at the school as irrelevant and unnecessary. Additionally, money allocated by the central government should first

be used to improve the school's security, such as safety equipment, maintenance of security assets, and procuring new safety-related equipment. During the interview, a vocational instructor commented on the lack of funding to buy necessary workshop equipment and materials for their students:

> *It is challenging for us to deliver good training. We can train them and provide just enough for their certification. However, we cannot expose them to the current industrial tools as our requests to buy such equipment were often rejected. So, we must be resourceful. For my workshop, for example, we were lucky to acquire materials and equipment from another vocational training centre that is now closed. We need to have materials currently being used in the industry. By not being able to do so, these residents will face difficulties competing with candidates from better institutions.*

Leone and Wruble (2015) encountered the same issue in their study. They suggested that a dedicated budget should be tabled based on a per-pupil cost basis, which includes the necessary money to buy essential equipment. By properly budgeting, educators and instructors could organise tailored programmes and replace damaged and outdated equipment at their workshops.

The 'security' and 'rehabilitation' conflict also compounds other problems. First, the absence of computers or any tech-based program within the compound was surprising. This finding also accords with observations by Awal et al. (2021), Someki and Allen (2021) and Leone and Wruble (2015), where there is a constraint on technology usage at such facilities. The decision was made to minimise the possible security risk posed by having such equipment on-site. As the residents are all minors, they are protected by law, which isolates them from exposure to the outside world. No computers or hand-held devices are permitted on location to prevent unnecessary disclosure through social media. Secondly, the residents may abuse such equipment, such as accessing and obtaining pornographic materials, which could create more problems within the vicinity. The academic teachers further suggest an ongoing conflict in providing residents with the best teaching and learning experiences. One senior teacher mentioned that:

> *It is different here. As teachers, we would like to use different approaches to motivate them (the residents) to learn. In a regular school, this could be done by giving them prizes such as chocolates or something like that, but we cannot practice such an approach due to security requirements. I understand why the management had to make this—to avoid smuggling contraband—and I fully support this decision. Whether we like it or not, these residents have much time, and they can be creative and manipulative, given the particular conditions given to them. Some tools like scissors, knives, or even pens are a security risk. We do not want them*

to have the materials to make weapons and use them to injure or kill someone else. You can see the security officers are always present to guarantee order, but this may not make them comfortable, having prying eyes watching their every step while they are learning… As you said, we cannot bring our handphones and money beyond the main gate. We are subjected to body searches every morning, and we cannot stay within the complex after 2.00 p.m.… the gate to the complex will be locked, so we must go home. There is no such thing as extra classes or tuition here. However, despite all that, we still manage to educate them. We have good academic achievement in SPM, and a number of our students were able to further their studies by doing degrees at training centres. So here… it is about having that will… when there is a will, there is a way.

Another interesting observation was the lack of sporting activities among the residents. All the residents must be in their blocks by 5.30 p.m., and the block gates will be locked by 6.30 p.m. The scenario suggests that the residents do not have any opportunity to get involved with any physical exercise despite its positive impact on reducing aggressive behaviour and depression (Nasir et al., 2010). One of the prison officers explained that:

It is entirely a decision made to protect them. Allowing them to play requires a lot of personnel. Due to our location in the bay area, some may take advantage of the situation and plot a runaway plan that may endanger themselves and the surrounding area. Plus, as the time usually nears sunset, when it gets dark quickly, such an event would be catastrophic for us. We want to avoid such circumstances.

Addressing this security versus rehabilitation challenge would not be easy. In this respect, no programme could be initiated without assuring safety among those involved. As observers, the researchers opine that the residents should enjoy more liberty and freedom in their teaching and learning, but doing so will pose a higher security risk. The symbiosis between security and rehabilitation necessitates close participation among policymakers, stakeholders, and government agencies to overcome this challenge. A long-term action plan should focus on recruiting more personnel and allocating more money to the institution. Nevertheless, considering the current post-COVID economic period, the move may not be a welcome option. It may create an unwanted public outcry as the fund could be directed to cater for other critical national interests. Nonetheless, better consideration and consolidation of the situation would lead to more fruitful results.

Challenge 2: Providing Ample Education and Vocational Training

The next challenge is the institution's ability to provide its residents with comprehensive education and vocational training due to limited access, a shortage of workforce, and

insufficient facilities. Based on a statistic provided by PDM in 2016 (Table 6), only 69% of the population was included in academic or vocational training at the institution. The situation did not improve during the observation, as the number of residents during the two weeks was around 1,200. According to one of the correctional officers, the increasing number of residents resulted in the closure of another facility dedicated to girls from a different locality. The researchers were further informed that the number of personnel at the facility remains the same despite the increase, which could reduce rehabilitation and education effectiveness.

Another direct impact of the increasing number of residents at the school is the limited number of spaces and rooms available to attend either academic classes or any skill-based training. As mentioned earlier, the institution's priority is the residents' and staff's safety and security before such activities occur. Due to inadequate space, the total number of participants at one time, such as at the school complex or a workshop, must be kept at a manageable number. Consequently, this situation created restrictions where only a certain number of people may access either activity. Although the residents were given the right to choose whether to continue their schooling or undergo skill-based training, the lack of access to programmes is no better (Leone & Wruble, 2015).

Other than access, an undermining issue exists where the female residents may not enjoy the same opportunity for vocational training. Helfenbein et al. (2011) highlighted that girls in the juvenile justice system are more prone to be neglected and treated differently from boys. Nevertheless, in the present study, this finding is not due to a genderised double standard but rather a combination of issues related to the challenges elaborated beforehand. For example, the female residents were often separated and segregated from their male counterparts to avoid unwarranted intimacy among the residents and to maintain security. Consequently, almost all workshops were inaccessible and off-limits for the female residents, thus restricting their ability to hone their skills and further their areas of interest. Notably, the facility has received RM50 million to build a new academic complex, including science labs, computers, and more classes to provide residents with more space.

Another pressing matter is the different academic attainment of these residents as they arrive at the school. When asked when they dropped out, the range was determined to be between Standard 6 (primary) and Form 2 (lower secondary). One of the senior teachers explained that:

> *The (resident's) academic background is essential. Even though we strain and choose only those with specific cognitive abilities, their previous academic standing is paramount. Because some*

Table 6
Participation in HGSTM residence in academic and vocational programme

Total	3M	Pre-SPM	SPM	SKM1
679	17	111	107	231

have stopped schooling for three or four years, getting them up to speed is very difficult. They quit school in Form 2 (14 years old) and arrived here when they were seventeen. [So] they are three or four years behind their friends who stayed in school. This brings unique challenges for us. First, we need to get them back to speed after so many years of no schooling. Secondly, we must prepare them for the [SPM] examination. This is one arduous task, as we are expected to deliver. Mind you, we have recorded a 100% passing rate, making us the most successful rehabilitation centre in Malaysia regarding academic achievement. This is good for the school as it suggests that whatever we do works. However, it also comes with enormous responsibility and pressure.

Furthermore, during one of the observations at the automotive workshop, one of the instructors shared that one of the trainees did not have a compulsory academic certificate since he had never attended school. Despite his interest and ability to work on an engine, the current system will not allow individuals like him to obtain the needed vocational certification that could later be used to seek employment once released. The trainee can never be eligible to apply for early release as it requires a working placement that can only be viable through a job application with substantial proof of training. One possible solution to this limitation is developing an accredited training programme that meets the Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning or APEL set by the Malaysia Qualification Agency (MQA). Under APEL, the residents' experiential learning (informal and non-formal) relevant to a programme can be evaluated and accepted for a credit award. The approach will inevitably open a new opportunity for the residents to gain the needed certificates.

Challenge 3: Continuous Inter-agencies and Community Support

Various perspectives were expressed outside and in communal support of the school. HGSTM receives help from multiple inter-agencies and the local community in implementing lifelong learning programmes within the institution, which is evident through various strategic collaborations with different entities within the school construct. The Ministry of Education has played a critical role in providing the school with qualified and experienced teachers to teach academic subjects. Besides, the automotive workshop works with a well-known Japanese-owned manufacturer that trains future mechanics. In addition, the local religious department has been sending qualified instructors to conduct religious classes. Numerous non-government organisations (NGOs) support programmes, such as motivational talks, skill-based enhancement courses, career days, and drug abuse awareness programmes, hoping to improve the resident's livelihood after release. More importantly, the Ministry of Youth's Yellow Ribbon Project, an

initiative to enhance inmates' and at-risk youth's abilities before their release, is benefiting 24,234 ex-detainees, ex-prisoners, Supervised Persons (ODS) and HGS residents through skills, sports, and entrepreneurship platform to ensure that they can return to the community with a better life. Launched on October 19th 2018, five clusters drive the project: the Skills Cluster, Sports Cluster, Entrepreneurship Cluster, Marketability Cluster, and Awareness Campaign Cluster. This project hopes to eliminate society's negative stigma towards this group and open up a second opportunity for this group.

The examples above support studies by Taib (2012) and Hashim et al. (2019) that the PDM has proactively provided education and training behind the fence by the Prison Act (1955). The practice is more than welcomed as the involvement of professionals at every point in educating juveniles can assist the long process of creating ethical citizens (Seroczynski & Jobst, 2016). Nevertheless, despite the above findings, the observation and interview sessions revealed some concerning remarks about these external aids. Based on the interviews, there is still room for aligning ideologies, institutional practices, society, and individual efforts towards creating opportunities for formerly incarcerated youths. The assistance provided has been inconsistent and often insufficient. One correctional officer iterated that the school is not receiving proper and ample support from the local segments of society. For example, the only industrial player that provides a real chance for work placement after release is the Japanese company that offers two posts per year to those who have completed their vocational training. This view was echoed by an informant who said:

> *I believe that the Department has done everything to rehabilitate these young offenders. To an extent, we are very successful. Behind closed doors, we teach them how to pray… memorised verses from the Quran… We send them to school to learn academics; if they do not enjoy those, we welcome them to our workshops. They know a lot here. The problem started when they were released. That is the moment when reality strikes them. They were 'unwanted' at every corner. We have cases where the resident's parents reject them and do not want to take them back. We have instances where the neighbours despise the very presence of the residents in their community. They were despised and outcasts. They cannot find work. They have an empty wallet, no place to stay, and an empty stomach… When that happens—when you are being rejected—where will you go? To whom do you turn? No matter how strong you are, you will have a breaking point. Furthermore, this is the moment when those 'friends' come back. That 'friend' that you took drugs with… that 'friend' that got you into stealing… before long, they reverted to their old ways and ended up back here or in prison, or they will end up dead.*

This finding will undoubtedly be much scrutinised, but there is immediate, dependable support for the informant's claim. As mentioned in Table 1, a significant increase in re-offending cases is observable among juveniles. Wald and Losen (2003) emphasised the importance of positive political will in preventing the school-to-prison pipeline. Although this perspective is beyond simplistic rhetoric that formal education can change them all, it is instead a process of acknowledging that the process requires recognising complex societal problems. James (2011) posed an interesting argument that the school-to-jail pipeline can only be eradicated when an active opportunity system is created to support these incarcerated youth. Nevertheless, through this study, the process can be concluded as ongoing. The residents of HGSTM, once released, are in danger of exclusion, labelling, and ill-treatment due to the negative social label. Realising the social stigma surrounding the policy changes should include ideological counter narratives that champion incarcerated youths as individuals who exhibit lifelong learning, manage and cope with societal change and function as constructive and active participants in society.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the metaphor embedded in the title vividly encapsulates the intricate nature of this study, portraying the formidable task of diverting young individuals from the school-to-jail pipeline. Much like leading a horse to water and hoping it drinks independently, the metaphor underscores the multifaceted challenges of actively persuading individuals to engage in transformative actions. It serves as a poignant reflection on the nuanced efforts required to effect positive change in the lives of those entangled in the criminal justice system. This research was set to explore ways children in conflict with the law are being educated at specialised institutions, determine challenges such institutions face, and provide suggestions to improve the current practice. As previous researchers have not explored education for incarcerated youth in detail, the present study has managed to discover challenges in increasing incarcerated youth's educational achievement and lowering recidivism. As suggested in the study's title, education for incarcerated youth should aim to deliver independent, self-serving, and inspired individuals motivated to improve their lives. As the rehabilitation programmes for incarcerated individuals in Malaysia started in the pre-independence period, various changes have been made to take heed of the ever-challenging task of rehabilitating these youth. By exploring this topic, the study has managed to pinpoint several areas of concern, such as the number of qualified personnel, collective effort from different government and private agencies, and providing ample and conducive space and environment to increase residents' participation in education and vocational

training that can improve the delivery of the current system. Changes to these areas would eradicate the school-to-jail pipeline, thus resulting in a more secure society.

Moreover, more research is needed concerning incarcerated youth education in Malaysia. As this study highlights incarceration institutions' challenges, a more pressing issue that requires attention would be the relationship between educational attainment and decreased criminal behaviour in Malaysia. The data may assist policymakers in improving the current practice and enhancing the potential social returns to society. Nevertheless, the study has not considered the resident's social background and history variables, including family background, parental criminality, family income, locality, the number of prior arrests, and out-of-home placements, which are known to influence criminal conduct. More importantly, the study has no objective evidence to suggest that postsecondary education can buffer criminal recidivism for young people. The researchers posed that the real challenge faced by any correctional or rehabilitation institutions in Malaysia or elsewhere can better understand *how* offenders change.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Ministry of Higher Education funded this research through the Fundamental Research Grant Scheme (F.R.G.S.) under grant number FRGS/1/2019/SSI09/UPNM/03/1. We would also like to express our gratitude to the Malaysian Prison Department and the UPNM Research and Innovation Division for their assistance and permission to collect the essential data for this study.

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