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'Redeem Your Past': Teaching Challenges and Hopes Behind Bar

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ABSTRACT

Prison is often perceived negatively due to its purposes such as retribution, incapacitation, deterrence, and rehabilitation for people who are legally held for a crime they have committed. However, the prison institutions are serving a larger-than-life mission to transform the inmates' life which includes correctional education. This study investigated the challenges faced by teachers in prison schools. Utilizing a qualitative research design, this case study involved seven teachers from the prison Integrity School for young inmates. The interview data were analyzed based on Braun and Clarke's thematic framework. Findings showed teaching challenges such as pedagogy, teaching and learning materials, policy and opportunities. Another emerging theme points to the hopes harbored to further improve educational attainment in prison. This has led to several suggestions such as (1) modules and skills-based course development to focus on young inmates serving short prison terms (minimum of 3 months); and (2) fluid and organic pedagogical approaches. Drawing upon Nelson Mandela's famous quote, 'education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world', this study is addressing more insights to add value to the young inmates' educational opportunities in prison school. Serving time in prison does not deter the inmates from pursuing their education because they deserve a second chance to reclaim their life post-prison term.

Contribution/Originality: This study contributes to the existing literature about prison education. Although prison has always been perceived as a centre to punish people who have committed crimes, it still must provide education to its inmates. This study highlights the importance of adding value to the young inmates' educational opportunities in prison school.

1. Introduction

There are assumptions that prison is perceived as an unconventional surrounding for education. This triggers a question whether or not offenders have the opportunities for education while serving their sentences. Coates (2016) pointed out that educating inmates with necessary skills is vital as this may unlock their potential, gain employment, and become assets to their communities. Education is one of the pillars to ensure effective rehabilitation. Therefore, pursuing their education during their sentences needs to be highlighted because they deserve a second chance to reclaim their life after they are released. However, recent literature suggests that pursuing education within the prison learning institution seems to be challenging due to various factors. The challenges faced by these inmates comprised the lack of reading materials, language contents and learning tools, suitable language learning modules, and trained language teachers (Coates, 2016). Despite these challenges, there might be situations where inmates show the interests to pursue their education while serving their time in prison.

As a correctional entity in Malaysia, Malaysian Prison Department (MPD) is responsible to provide a safe detention and rehabilitation institution (Malaysian Prison Department, n.d) for its inmates---male and female adults, as well as young inmates---in order to reduce inmates' recidivation and to turn them into useful citizens upon release. To ensure this, Malaysian Prison Department is responsible for the implementation of the rehabilitation programs for the inmates through various approaches (Malaysian Prison Department, n.d.). The Rehabilitation and Treatment Department of the MPD is responsible in orchestrating, designing and implementing various rehabilitation programs for inmates (Malaysian Prison Department, n.d.). One of the programs is the Human Development Plan (*Program Pembangunan Insan*: PPI henceforth) (Amos & Khairani, 2019). The purpose of PPI is to design and implement the inmates' rehabilitation activities over a four-phase system, namely:

- a. Orientation Phase: During this phase, the inmates undergo a two-month physical training from the prisoner discipline officer. The training aims to establish a balance between mental and physical activities, to instill positive attitudes, to make them feel more confidence, and to cultivate a strong personality among the inmates.
- b. Reinforcement Phase: This phase emphasizes the aspects of identity formation and changes in inmates' behavior through these programs, i.e., therapeutic community, halaqah (a religious gathering or meeting for the study of Islam and the Quran), academic guidance and education.
- c. Skills Phase: The phase is designed to supply and educate inmates with vocational skills, and the programs of this phase are assisted by several agencies. Successful inmates will be awarded with vocational certifications like

- SLDN, SKM, LAP, KK and CIDB at the end of the programs. Nevertheless, this phase is for selected inmates who have been sentenced to prison for at least two years.
- d. Pre-Free Phase: This phase caters inmates with the remaining sentence of not more than one year and they have undergone all the three phases (i.e., Orientation Phase, Reinforcement Phase and Skills Phase) before their release. It aims to help inmates to face and endure the social stigma positively, and to encourage them to assimilate with the public through programs such as We Care and Community Care.

Adapted from Malaysian Prison Department (n.d.)

At the end of the programs, successful inmates would be awarded vocational certifications like SLDN, KK or others. Based on these rehabilitation activities, the inmates, specifically the young inmates, are not deprived of education. Apart from taking part in PPI, they are also provided with similar opportunities like their out-of-prison-counterparts in terms of access to education albeit disparities in terms of approach and activities in the Prison Integrity School. The young inmates age groups range from 14 to 20 years old. They can attain academic qualification regardless of their circumstances (i.e., serving time in prison) with the initiatives and programs designed for them by the MPD.

Nevertheless, there is a need to draw the difference between the juvenile and young inmates' categories. Although the inmates in both categories fall under similar age group category, they are, however, sentenced under different acts. The juvenile inmates are sentenced under Child Act while the young inmates are sentenced under Civil Act. Differences in Act Persecution has brought a myriad of impacts to both offenders such as serving time, impacts of the sentence for their future, education, and career opportunities. To establish a background here, those young inmates' serving time varies from as short as three months to lifetime imprisonment. While the juvenile inmates are facing with the predetermined three or four years serving time and could be shorter should they pursue their studies in a higher learning institution. In this paper, the young inmates refer to offenders between 14 to 20 years old who are detained within the prison institutions in Malaysia.

Considering the differences as mentioned previously - specifically on the young inmates - due to varied sentences, this case study focuses on their opportunities for education while serving time in prison. Therefore, the aim of this case study is to investigate the teachers' perceptions on the current teaching and learning activities in the prison school. Thus, the research question is as follow: how do teachers in the prison school perceive the young inmates' education pathways in prison schools?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Education in Malaysian Prisons

Education is one of the important aspects in human lives. Through education, one can pursue and create a better lifestyle from the perspective of academic, co-curriculum and self-esteem. Therefore, education is one of the basic rights that should be granted to everyone. Everyone should have access to education. In general, the education in Malaysia is implemented through school system where the schools function as the significant

institution in disseminating knowledge to students. The school system does not only available to certain students but also to all categories of students, including those in prisons. A prison should not only be a place to punish offenders. It should also become an institution to heal, lead and educate offenders, and so that they can become a new person with good discipline and intact responsibility once they are released to society (Hasnizam et al., 2018).

The prisons in Malaysia have over 200 years of history (Hasnizam et al., 2018). It has been first established during the British reign. At that time, the increasing number of offenders had made the prison to include educational programs as one of the methods in rehabilitating process. However, the prison found the education programs for the inmates were not enough although the student-oriented education method like the teaching of labor jobs, such as making bricks, had been implemented. The inmates were not productive in performing prisons' works. They were also found easily feeling bored considering that one of the prison policies carried out at that time was to punish the inmates mentally and emotionally. Thus, the British has decided not to make prisons as a place of abuse and punishment, but also functions as a place of rehabilitation and treatment.

In relation to this, the British implemented aspects of the education in all prisons in Malaya (now is known as Malaysia) in 1941. First, they built the schools in stages, opened more libraries and intensified learning efforts. The change in this rehabilitation concept was called Correctional Education. This concept has become the key method of the inmates' rehabilitation process. From 1950 to 1960, the inmates were trained in rattans making, book binding, wood, iron, copper workshops, handicraft, shoes making, plastic, bed makings, sewing workshop and so on (Hasnizam et al., 2018). The early education of these inmates was on learning the basics, i.e., reading, writing and calculation/counting. It was then evolved to more formal education like learning Malay and English languages. As time changes, vocational education was introduced to cultivate skills and provide basic industrial knowledge to inmates (Siti Alwaliyah & Ahmad Kamal, 2019).

After independence, various rehabilitation programs were introduced by the MPD, such as Ibrahim System, Consultation, Therapeutic Community, *Halaqah* (a religious gathering or meeting for the study of Islam and the Quran) and Human Development Program (PPI) (Hasnizam et al., 2018). With these various programs, it can be concluded that MPD or Malaysian Prison Department believes that providing education for its inmates is among its important focus.

2.2. Purpose of Prison Education

The purpose of prison education is to improve and enhance the juvenile inmates' moral. It also aims to equip them with skills and knowledge like reading, calculation, writing as well as other lessons prepared in prisons. Education in prison aims to cultivate its inmates' confidence and to convince them on the importance of education as the key to better future (Jabatan Penjara Malaysia, 2009). The prison education's goals are aligned with the Ministry of Education Malaysia, where effective infrastructure and system must be provided. The prison's rehabilitation programs, and school systems support the prison's mission on education. Although the inmates' lessons focus more on discipline and moral education, they are also equipped with academic excellence. Therefore, to provide an efficient education system, the prisons emphasis the importance of discipline and

morals, school as an entity, complete infrastructure, hostel placement and teaching staff (Darussalam, 2013).

2.3. Henry Gurney and Integrity Schools in Malaysia

Malaysian Prison Department (MPD) is a part of the Criminal Justice System in Malaysia. It plays a significant role in ensuring the inmates to have access to education. The MPD initiative on this matter should be given credit because there are only a few countries in the world offer education to its inmates, and Malaysia is one of them (Darussalam, 2013). This initiative is in line with the policy brought by UNESCO that is "education for all" (UNESCO, 2000). The needs to provide education for inmates are also due to several factors. Among the factors are (Darussalam, 2013):

- a. The juvenile inmates are aged between 15 to 21 years old, and they are at the ages where they should get education from schools or higher education institutions.
- b. National Education Policy states that students aged 12 to 17 years old should get education from secondary schools. Since the juvenile inmates' age are within this range, they should be given access to education.
- c. The needs to comply to several acts and regulations, the requirements to give the juvenile inmates access to education. Among the acts are the Child Act 2001, Henry Gurney School Rules, *Peraturan-Peraturan Penjara 2000* or translated as Prison Regulations 2000 and United Nation Standard Minimum (UNSMR).
- d. The acts and regulations show the importance of providing education and having systematic management. The education provided must be governed systematically like a mainstream school---with school name, student's category, student's age, gender, learning class, learning stream, examination candidate and center.

In relation to this, MPD has implemented education in prison through school system. The prison education (school) is provided to juvenile and young inmates aged between 15 to 21 years old. The schools are Henry Gurney and Integrity Schools. The difference between these two schools is that juvenile inmates sentenced by Juvenile Court through Child Act 2001 will be sent to Henry Gurney School, whereas young inmates sentenced by other than Juvenile Court will be sent to Integrity School (Jabatan Penjara Malaysia, 2020). Young offenders aged less than 14 years old will be placed under the care of Tunas Bakti School managed by the Social Welfare Department (Mohd Taufik & Suhaila, 2021). It was recorded in 2016, a total of 2356 juvenile inmates and young inmates enrolled in Henry Gurney and Integrity Schools in Malaysia (Mohd Taufik & Suhaila, 2021). These two schools provide a second chance for its students to experience learning like those in the mainstream schools. Although the students are undergoing their sentence in prisons, they still get the opportunity to create better future.

Henry Gurney School was originally a prison school in Muar, Johor Prison in 1948. The school was known as *Sekolah Pemulihan Lanjutan* or translated as Advanced Rehabilitation School at that time and was a prison school for juvenile offenders. The school was then moved to Telok Mas, Melaka (Malacca) in 1950, and was given a new name, Henry Gurney School, in conjunction with the British High Commissioner at that time, Sir Henry Gurney (Muzium Penjara, 2014). Although the country (Malaysia) has achieved its independence, Henry Gurney School continues to be maintained due its obvious significance in helping to build a better future for juvenile offenders after their release. Later, the school has been established in a few states in Malaysia to ensure that more juvenile offenders receive education. Currently, MPD has established four Henry

Gurney Schools, namely Henry Gurney Keningau Sabah, Henry Gurney (Women) Kota Kinabalu Sabah, Henry Gurney Borneo Sarawak and Henry Gurney Telok Mas Melaka (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2022).

Integrity School, on the other hand, was first established in 2008 through a collaboration between the MPD and Ministry of Education Malaysia. At present, there are nine Integrity Schools in Malaysia, namely Sekolah Integriti Sungai Petani Kedah, Sekolah Integriti Puncak Alam Selangor, Sekolah Integriti Marang Terengganu, Sekolah Integriti Keluang Johor, Sekolah Integriti Kota Kinabalu Sabah, Sekolah Integriti (Women) Kota Kinabalu Sabah, Sekolah Integriti Kuching Sarawak, Sekolah Integriti Muar Johor and Sekolah Integriti Bentong Pahang. Most of the students in integrity schools are aged between 15 to 21 years old, and involve in various crimes like murder, rape, theft, and robbery. Many of them come from troubled families like divorced parents, low-income-level family, lost parents due to death, runaway parents, or others, and many more (Asmawati et al., 2018). The students or the young offenders have low educational background, and some dropped out of schools. Based on their different offences and educational background, MPD has developed and prepared a rehabilitation program suitable for the current state of the young inmates. This program is called the Human Development Plan or Pelan Pembangunan Insan (PPI). The plan has four main phases: Orientation, Personality Reinforcement, Skills and Pre-Free phase (Sharifah Norshah & Mohd Yakub, 2008) (the description of each phase has been explained in the earlier part of the article). All in all, Integrity Schools have given opportunities to young offenders to get education although they are behind bars (Jabatan Penjara Malaysia, 2020).

Henry Gurney and Integrity Schools were registered as public schools in January 2011, and the activities of the schools are governed by the Ministry of Education Malaysia. Therefore, the students registered to these schools will have to take public examinations like Penilaian Menengah Rendah or Lower Secondary Assessment (PMR) and Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia or Malaysian Certificate of Education (SPM) (Asmawati et al., 2018). Both schools offer formal education based on the co-curriculum of the Ministry of Education Malaysia. Yet, the management and administration of the schools are governed by the Malaysian Prison Department (MPD), under the Education Sector. Nevertheless, the teachers' matters, and the education operation are managed by both, the Ministry of Education Malaysia and Malaysian Prison Department. 11 teachers are placed in each school, i.e., eight teachers for certain subjects, a counselling teacher, an Islamic religious teacher, and a rehabilitation teacher. In addition, the schools are categorized according to gender following the Prison Regulations 2000---no mixed gender is allowed in either Henry Gurney or Integrity schools. However, the schools can have mixed gender students based on certain situations and time, as long as it does not affect the safety issue. The offered in these schools include the 3M lessons (reading, writing calculating/counting), Forms 1 and 2, Pre-SPM, SPM and STPM (Malaysian Higher School Certificate) (Ministry of Education Malaysia). Foreign nationals' offenders are only allowed to take the 3M classes and the Skills Stream (Darussalam, 2013).

In addition, students of Henry Gurney and Integrity Schools have achieved excellent results in their studies. Some students of Henry Gurney and Integrity Schools have obtained 9A (excellent marks) in SPM (Malaysian Certificate of Education). In 2019, 25 inmates have successfully continued their studies in Diploma, nine inmates continued to do their first degree, four did masters and two did their doctorate study (PhD) (Jabatan Penjara Malaysia, 2020). This achievement shows that both schools play a significant role to these juvenile offenders and young inmates. Although the numbers of achievement are

small, still it proves that there are inmates who will take this opportunity---to get education in prison---to improve themselves for the betterment. All these illustrate that Malaysian Prison Department has achieved its objective to treat and rehabilitate its inmates through education in prison.

2.4. Past Studies on Prison Education

Several scholars have been studying about education in prison from many aspects and perspectives. Abdullah (2001), Davis et al. (2013), Lochner and Moretti (2004), Parkinson (2017), Reuss (1997), Rosmilawati, Suherman and Darmawan (2020), Scholarworks and Dayton (2021), Steurer (2020), Vacca (2004) and Winterfield et al. (2009) are among the scholars studying prison education. Their studies can be categorized into several main themes. Firstly, the studies are based on basis or concept. For example, Abdullah (2001) focuses on the concept of prison education. He studied the Islamic concept of the prison education focusing on prison educational activities and inmates' experiences in prison. Rosmilawati, Suherman and Darmawan (2020) also studied similar focus. They looked at the importance and goodness of prison education among the inmates of all levels, especially the young inmates.

On the contrary, Scholarworks and Payton (2021) focused on the teachers' perspectives on prison educational programs in recidivism. Their findings illustrate that a systematic and well-planned education programs in prisons, in general, can reduce the recidivism among inmates. Since education can become the main catalyst to mobilize social and economic aspects of a community, prison education is the best method to decrease the crime rates and to give positive impact to the community. Reuss (1997) also found that basic education does not only motivate goodness among inmates, but it also changes their behavior, attitude, and characteristics for the better. Other scholars like Davis et al. (2013) and Lochner and Moretti (2004) further confirmed the effectiveness of prison education when they found that only 14% to 26% of the inmates returned to prisons after released. Parkinson (2017) believes that this percentage can be reduced if the pedagogy or the teaching method applied in prison is implemented creatively and more flexible based on situations, inmates' personalities and many more.

3. Methodology

A case study approach utilizing an individual interview was applied to collect the data of the study. The case study approach helps the researchers to focus on the study within the confines of space and time on a specific case (Schoch, 2019). It is the most suitable approach when the researchers want to better explore, understand, or explain a situation within a particular context (Yin, 2018). Individual interview is congruent with the research question and aim of the study: to elicit the participants' perceptions on the current teaching and learning activities in a prison school. Thus, a purposive sampling method was used to select the participants of the study. Purposive sampling method identifies and selects participants, who have the knowledge and experience about the issues being studied (Creswell & Clark, 2011). Seven participants, who were the teachers teaching young inmates in one of the prisons in East Malaysia, were interviewed on separate date and time. The teachers have more than five years of teaching experiences in prison schools and have at least a Bachelor Degree in Education. These teachers (the participants of the study) have the direct experiences and knowledge about the topic being studied. The participants were interviewed in seven different sessions via Google Meet, and for ethical reason, the participants were identified as Participant A (PA),

Participant B (PB), Participant C (PC), Participant D (PD), Participant E (PE), Participant F (PF) and Participant G (PG). Table 1 shows the interview sessions of the participants.

Table 1: Interview Sessions of the Participants

Participants	Date @ Time
PA	1 July 2022 @ 2 p.m.
PB	27 July 2022 @ 2 p.m.
PC	28 July 2022 @ 9 a.m.
PD	29 July 2022 @ 2 p.m.
PE	3 August 2022 @ 10 a.m.
PF	5 August 2022 @ 10 a.m.
PG	6 August 2022 @ 10 a.m.

The interviews data were then transcribed and analyzed based on Braun and Clarke's (2013) six steps of Thematic Analysis (TA), namely becoming familiar with the data by transcribing the data and reading the data repeatedly, coding the data, searching, and reviewing potentialthemes, giving definition, and naming the themes, and producing a report of the data analysis.

4. Result

The themes derived from the interview were divided into four emergent themes, namely 1) teaching and learning challenges in prison schools; 2) modules and skills-based course development for the young inmates serving short prison terms (a minimum of 3 months); 3) fluid and organic pedagogical approaches; and 4) hopes for the young inmates' education opportunities.

4.1. Teaching and Learning Challenges in a Prison School

Although the prison schools are under the *Kementerian Dalam Negeri* (KDN) or Ministry of Home Affairs' supervision, the syllabus used is similar to that in the mainstream schools. The teachers are also qualified, trained, and resourced via the Ministry of Education pools of human resources. However, there were few challenges faced by both teachers and the young inmates in the prison school in which the syllabus used were incompatible with the short prison terms (less than a year). The issue underpinning the inmates' sentences highlight the challenges in prison school. Like the one-schooling-year for mainstream school students to complete, the syllabus in prison school is also designed for one academic year. Nevertheless, for inmates serving short sentences or on remand, they could not benefit from it due to the nature of the syllabus. In prison school, inmates serving short sentences would be unable to complete one schooling year because they will be released in between schooling year. This was pointed out by participants A and B:

"I was concerned with young inmates serving short prison terms. They basically follow the lessons in the middle of the class and left before the end of academic year.' (PA)

'There was nothing much I can do for those young inmates who were here for 3 or 4 months or especially those who were here in less than 1 year because I was required to teach according to the syllabus.' (PB)

The other challenges identified during the interview also pointed to the inmates' direction after completing their secondary school in prison. The challenges concerning this issue are twofold: (1) the opportunities to pursue tertiary education; and (2) financial support. Participants C stated that:

'There were courses offered by a university and scholarships, too. But they were other obstacles especially for those inmates who were released. They were unsure of their next steps and directions to pursue studies and where to find financial support. This situation, as I could foresee, might coerce them for recidivism.' (PC)

In view of the perceptions and experiences shared by the participants, a specific module or program catering for the young inmates serving short prison terms is timely and needed. Moreover, these inmates should be given more exposure to further directions in education such as pursuing studies in tertiary education and searching for financial support.

4.2. Modules and Skills-based Course Development

The participants also showed concerns regarding the young inmates' short-term sentences and mismatch of syllabus to cater for their education in the prison school. In view of this, they pointed out the need to develop short courses modules for these young inmates. This module might focus on specific contents or skills taken from the existing syllabus. This is to avoid young inmates' deprivation of the rights for education and schooling although they were learning in a difficult or, rather, challenging context. This was reiterated by the responses below:

'They were serving short-term imprisonment, so there was nothing much for the syllabus to prepare them for life...I think. It might be good if skills like ordering food in fast food restaurant such as KFC or McD can be taught to them...like teaching them simple English to use in every day's life.' (PE)

'I think we should focus on the skills they could use when they were released, you know.... skills like letter or email writing (or any skills will do), maybe not so much taken from the syllabus as some of them were not in schools for many years. They came to school only because they were here in prison'. (PG)

Participant A further suggested that for the context of prison school, modules and skills-based courses development would be beneficial because it could provide the young inmates serving short prison terms with at least substantial exposure to certain subjects or skills before their release. She stated that:

'The specific module or skills-based course can at least provide them [young inmates] with knowledge that they need to survive and reintegrate with the community when release' (PA).

4.3. Fluid and Organic Pedagogical Approaches

The context of prison school is challenging in terms of the students, syllabus, and the environment. These aspects intertwined which had made the prison school unique and

different from the mainstream schools. In view of this, the pedagogical approaches might be similar or perhaps required a rather personalized approach exclusive to its context. Participants G and F mentioned that:

I don't have to worry about disciplining them here because we have the prison officers for that. But I taught in mainstream schools before and I realized the approach for teaching here was, of course, different. For example, some students who had just returned from court hearing they were clouded with emotional turmoil, so can you imagine if they had the desire to learn at that time? So, what should I do? There was no guideline preparing you for this kind of situation'. (PG)

'I must be creative and flexible with my teaching and the approach, today is different approach. Tomorrow is another story. I must look at the students and the backgrounds they are from. Some are illiterate so they will join 3M class while those literates can join the Pre-SPM or SPM class. Can you imagine teaching those 18 and 19 years old how to read? Reading the syllable, for example, of course they have their own ego and would not like to be looked down by their peers. So, to avoid this situation I must be creative with my approach because there is no one size fits all situations here'. (PF)

The situations as explained above required a rather fluid and organic pedagogical approaches so learning would be more personalized that concurrently delivers breadth of study and flexible learning pathways.

4.4. Hopes for the Young Inmates' Education Pathways

Despite the challenges, the participants harbored their hopes in the teaching as well as learning aspects along with the inmates' quest for future. Participants A, C and D stated that:

'We need to encourage them to further studies since some scored good results or at least pass SPM'. (PA)

'I will encourage them to at least take SPM because with SPM they have more opportunities to pursue skills-based courses such as taking certificate or diploma'. (PC)

'It is important for them to identify their directions after they are released from prison. They are still young and have the future ahead of them. But many of them think that they no longer have future due to crime record. This kind of mentality will encourage recidivism'. (PD)

This finding suggested that education plays a significant role for these young inmates to reclaim the second chance in life. Although the participants indicated that many of the young inmates expressed the apprehension towards their own 'bleak' future, there are still hopes lurking ahead of them. This is one of the greatest responsibilities shared by the participants of the study that is to encourage and nurture these young inmates to reclaim their life when they are released from prison.

5. Discussion

In this study, the teaching challenges and hopes among teachers in school were obtained by interviewing teachers to gauge more in-depth data regarding the teaching and learning scenarios in the prison school. The followings are the participants/the prison-school teachers' perception on the current teaching and learning activities in the prison school.

5.1. Teaching and Learning Challenges in a Prison School

The most important challenge here relates to the mismatch of syllabus and young inmates serving short prison terms (i.e., less than one year and on remand). Although proper educational programs were developed for these young inmates in the prison school, this study emphasized the needs for the young inmates, especially those serving the short prison terms and on remand, to complete a learning cycle or at least a learning module for useful educational attainment. This was further corroborated with the findings of a study conducted by Jasni and Che Mohd Nasir (2021) where education was highlighted as one of the prominent external factors to secure employments and lifting former inmates' self-esteem. Thus, an important finding in this study suggested that suitable learning modules should be developed to cater for the young inmates on remand and serving short prison terms while learning in the prison school.

Apart from the syllabus mismatching and short prison terms, another important finding in line with teaching and learning challenges pointed to human resource limitation since the teachers were restricted with the syllabus, examination, and subjects' expertise. Therefore, these teachers could not simply prepare a program or module to cater for only specific group of students since they must fulfil their core responsibility as outlined by the Ministry of Education. Darussalam (2014) stated that the limitations related to the subjects offered, learning materials (reference books and reading materials), mixed ability learners and disrupted teaching and learning activities due to absenteeism for several reasons such as court hearing, urine tests, inconsistent students' registration, and release on bail among others were identified as the challenges in prison schools. Although Darussalam's findings were more comprehensive in various aspects, the limitation pertaining to the subjects offered within the prison school was in line with the argument here related to syllabus mismatching. This argument brought the researchers' attention to the next issue related to modules and skills-based course development.

5.2. Modules and Skills-based Courses Development

The previous section argues the mismatching of the syllabus specifically for the young inmates on remand and serving short prison terms. This domino effect has brought the urgency and needs to develop learning modules or skills-based courses for a complete learning cycle. If more suitable modules and courses are to be developed, the young inmates can benefit from it as pointed out by Scholarworks and Payton (2021) in which well-planned and systematic Prison Educational Program may reduce recidivism among inmates. Since education is seen as the main gateway to mobilize the social and economy aspects of a community, it may perhaps reduce crime rates in society too (Scholarworks & Payton, 2021).

There were vocational programs and skill-based courses developed for the young inmates in the prison. The findings of this study, however, outlined the soft skills-based courses and more academic focus modules in an attempt to give 'voices' for the teachers under

study to channel their experiences and hopes after teaching in the prison school for numerous years. This hope as harbored by these teachers was echoed in some success stories of young offenders pursuing academic education whilst imprisoned within the Malaysian prisons institutions particularly in a few Integrity Schools and in Malacca Henry Gurney School, for instance: 13 students obtained 4A to 9A in 2017 *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (SPM henceforth); three students from 157 candidates achieved 7A and at least 68 people with 1A in 2016 SPM; one student of Sungai Petani Integrity School obtained 7A and 1B SPM 2010 (Rosfizah, 2018). In addition, Rafedzi and Abrizah (2016) reinforced that young inmates were able to think critically and logically about their future should they have the opportunity to pursue knowledge from primary to secondary school and higher education. Thus, should more educational opportunities be provided in prison schools, it may open more avenues for these young inmates to discover their hidden potential to contribute positively when they reintegrate into the community upon release.

5.3. Fluid and Organic Pedagogical Approaches

It is important for the prison school to adopt more fluid and organic pedagogical approaches considering the unique context in the prison school as compared to the mainstream schools. Darussalam (2014) pointed that the frequent issue of enrolment registration and termination of students every month disrupted teaching and learning activities. In addition, most of these young inmates wish to pursue their abandoned academic activities they left behind (Rosfizah, 2018). Therefore, they struggled to continue their academic activities in the prison school. From another vantage point, Darussalam (2014) further noted that these students come from different education backgrounds from an extreme end of illiterate inmates to another end of those who have completed at least Form Four in secondary school. This imbalance in terms of age groups and education background is another challenge faced by the current study that calls for more fluid and organic approach not only prior to develop learning modules but also in teaching approaches.

This study outlined similar findings to that of Rosfizah (2018) and Darussalam (2014). To address the existing problems in the prison school, more fluid and organic approaches in module and course design, learning pathways and time are suitable. Learning should be more flexible in terms of the methods use in teaching (personalized learning depending on the inmates' needs), time (the lessons are not fixed and can be taught anytime depending on inmates' availability) and flexible teaching and learning activities. The approach in the prison school should be different from the conventional instructions to avoid fixed timeline and rigid syllabus because the young inmates are *in dire* need of useful educational programs and/or learning activities as a more practical tool to help them rebuild their own self-esteem and resistance (Rosfizah, 2018).

5.4. Hopes for the Young Inmates' Education Pathways

One of the significant findings discovered here pertained to the young inmates' education pathways. The question, however, remains what further educational opportunities available for these young inmates? One possible argument related to this issue may link to their feeling of uncertainty and doubtful of their deficiencies that might challenge them in reaching their educational goal (Intan et al., 2018). Previous studies revealed the system failure in providing adequate preparation for education upon release or when they reintegrated into the community (Chung, Schubert & Mulvey, 2007; Mazzotti& Higgins, 2006; Altschuler & Brash, 2004; Klehr, 2009). However, relevant authorities such as KDN

(Ministry of Home Affairs) and MOE (Ministry of Education Malaysia) may pacify this issue by collaborating to enhance academic wellness and educational success of the young inmates. In addition, the partnership by relevant and various stakeholders may provide more assistance such as providing scholarships, supplying learning, and reading materials in the prison school or organizing educational supplementary programs for the young inmates to learn from university lecturers or any experts in various field of studies on voluntary basis.

6. Conclusion

This study explored teachers' perceptions of the educational pathways of young inmates. It aimed to investigate the prison-school teachers' perceptions on the current teaching and learning activities in the prison school. As discussed, prison education faces a variety of challenges, including a lack of reading materials, language content and learning tools, suitable language learning modules, and trained language teachers. The differences in Acts of Persecutions for young offenders have significant implications for the teaching and learning process in prison schools. Therefore, the findings gained from this study have given insights on the teaching and learning challenges in prison schools that should be addressed by the Malaysian Prison Department (MPD). First, it is challenging for the short-term inmates to benefit from the one schooling year-syllabus designed for the mainstream school in prison schools. Therefore, the teachers believed it is important to develop a short course focused on competency-based modules that taught young inmates self-improvement skills such as how to communicate using simple English. Also, the learning timeline and syllabus should also be flexible in order to accommodate these short-term young inmates of various age. Second, pedagogically, the teachers must be creative in their teaching because the students they meet and teach are different from the students in mainstream schools. Most of them have low educational and problematic family backgrounds that affect their performance and learning interest in prison schools. Also, the teachers need to check the inmates' learning ability as well as to carefully deal with the emotional turmoil of the inmates, especially when they had just returned from their court hearing. Lastly, it is noteworthy to point out the limitation of the study in terms of its sample size. Not only were the samples small, but they were also statistically unrepresentative of the entire teacher population in the prison schools. Nevertheless, considering the scarcity of related studies conducted in the context of prison schools, the findings of this study provide more fertile grounds for further research into education for the young inmates in prison schools. Thus, it is recommended that more studies on this topic should be conducted in future and a larger sample of participants (not only the teachers, but also the inmates) should be used for the robustness of the findings.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

The researchers obtained the permission from Malaysian Prison Department to conduct the study in Kota Kinabalu Prison, and the participants had consented to provide data for the study.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors reported no conflicts of interest for this work and declare that there is no potential conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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