

Exploring the Youth's Social Mobility towards Socio-economic Development: A Case Study of Bagan Datuk, Perak, Malaysia

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Abstract

The news and government report on Malaysian youths' reluctance to sit for their high school examinations and further their studies have become a significant problem for Malaysia's social capital, socioeconomic development, and future outlook. It was reported that, 25,000 SPM (Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia) candidates did not want to sit for the 2022 examination, while 72.1% of SPM leavers do not want to pursue for tertiary education. It is troubling when the young generation's contribution to the national growth is crucial in achieving the Shared Prosperity Vision 2030 (WKB2030) and the 12th National Plan (RMK12). The endemic phase aggravated the youth unemployment rate, thus slowing the domestic economy for the local population, especially in suburban and rural areas. Tasked with the challenges of seeking employment and family economics had limited other development opportunities such as tertiary education and entrepreneurship. This study explored the issues of the youths' social mobility in the state of Perak, Malaysia. The countries' national agenda and the dynamics of youth mobility strategies formed the conceptual framework for exploring the challenges through a qualitative design research project. The findings evoked youths' input on entrepreneurial interests and feedback for policymakers and other relevant stakeholders to circumvent and resolve the dwindling number of youths' socioeconomic mobility. The implications from the bottom-up findings provide realistic insights from the current young generation on their wants for the change champions and the government to adjust the national and state strategies to create a society where there is youth fidelity by having realistic opportunities for empowerment towards their potential, contribute to the community and self-advance socioeconomically.

Keywords: Youth Mobility, Social Capital, Socio-Economy, Fidelity

Introduction

The endemic phase, or the post-pandemic times brought about new challenges for rural communities. In adapting to the lifestyle changes such as personal hygiene and public health, the communities must explore alternatives to rebuild the socio-economy. With more than 32 million people, Malaysia's working segment (age 15-64 years) is 67.6% of the overall population (DOSM, 2022). From the population decile, the household income estimates, and the incidence of poverty report, Malaysia, 2020 recorded a decrease of 16.1% and 9.7% in paid employment and self-employment, respectively (DOSM, 2021). Considering that the COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted the country and the world's economies, there is an immediate need to revive household income and Malaysia's growth. Challenges abound for many developing countries to recover from the pandemic and financial instability. Aside from these, the news and a government report on Malaysian youths' reluctance to sit for their high school examinations and further their studies have become a significant problem for Malaysia's social capital, socioeconomic development, and future outlook. From these reports, 25,000 SPM (Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia) candidates did not want to sit for the 2022 examination, while 72.1% of SPM leavers do not want to pursue tertiary education. It creates problem and dilemma when the young generation's contribution to national growth which is crucial in achieving the Shared Prosperity Vision 2030 (WKB2030) and the 12th National Plan (RMK12) are effected. The endemic phase aggravated the youth unemployment rate, thus slowing the domestic economy for the local population, especially in suburban and rural areas. They were tasked with the challenges of seeking employment; family economics limits other development opportunities, such as seeking tertiary education and entrepreneurship. Therefore, this paper aims to explore the barriers to the youths' social mobility in the state of Perak, Malaysia.

About Bagan Datuk, Perak, Malaysia

Verbatim descriptions on this locality were obtained from online sources. In brief, Bagan Datuk town was founded by Tok Kelah in 1896. At that time, the town was called Pekan Baru. Later, Pekan Baru was changed to Bagan Datoh (currently, Bagan Datuk) to refer to the Malay settlement built along the banks of rivermouth of the Perak River (Figure 1). Bagan Datuk is famed for coconut cultivation, thus making agriculture the main economic livelihood of the people in that district (PDTBD, 2022). In terms of governance, the Bagan Datuk district is under the administration of the land and district office. Referring to Figure 2, the district of Bagan Datuk is divided into four smaller administrative divisions known as *mukim* which are; Bagan Datuk, Hutan Melintang, Rungkup and Teluk Bharu.



Figure 1: History of Bagan Datuk (Source: Bagan Datuk Land and District Office, 2022)



Figure 2: Map of Bagan Datuk Districts (Source: Wikipedia, 2022)

Bagan Datuk sits on 951.52 km² (367.38 sq mi) (Wikipedia, 2022) or 94,969 hectare (Figure 1). The population of Bagan Datuk as at 2022 is 70,300 (Figure 1). As previously noted, the main economic activities in Bagan Datuk are agriculture, fishing, tourism and small-medium enterprises (Figure 1).

Literature Review

To reiterate, the study explored the barriers to social mobility towards youth fidelity in the district of Bagan Datuk, Perak. Hence, the first part of the literature will review pertinent and relevant sources on social mobility before tapering off to youth mobility. The section will then conceptualize a framework from the reviews undertaken.

Rural Youth Mobility

The issue of youth mobility or outbound migration for a developing country like Malaysia is not new. After the pandemic, young adults from rural areas continued to move to the cities for similar reasons as those stated by Koikkalainen et al (2022), which are, to further their studies, work, career, life goals and lifestyle changes. The same findings were reported by Shakur et al. (2020). There have been cases where the young adults have returned to their hometowns after several years of sojourn (Linares, 2003). The migration or mobility patterns

differ by culture and traditions. In Malaysia, the significant percentage of the aging population for Malaysia has also evidenced the youth fidelity when they return to their villages and communities to care for their elderly parents. As posited by White (2021), the generational perspective on young people's aspirations and their mobility out of and perhaps later back into farming is an important life course. Thus, conceptualizing the youth mobility trajectories is an important for trend analysis (Van Geel & Mazzucato, 2018), yet allowing for replications within other scopes and timeline. Relating the mobility variables to this study, exploring the rural youths interests for career projects such as entrepreneurship are essential strategies for their community's socio-economic development. Since agriculture remains the staple income generation activities, new entrepreneurial projects can be innovated to fit the markets and the changing times (White, 2019). Consequently, community engagement activities are suggested for networking and collaborating on similar projects to reduce unnecessary drain of human capital towards pluriactivity (Martinez et al., 2016; Ohe, 2020).

Reinforcing Youth Fidelity

The Oxford Languages (2022) defined fidelity as "faithfulness to a person, cause, or belief demonstrated by continuing loyalty and support". These are also characteristics of a filial son or daughter. Combining the age range for young adults to that of being a filial offspring, youth fidelity is a term that aptly describes the child's return to their birthplace. Within the study's context, youth fidelity is parallel to pluriactivity as the Bagan Datuk's main economic productivity is through agriculture. Which means that the rural entrepreneurial ecosystem in linking youth mobility for agricultural development is essential to increase the livelihood and social wellbeing of the disadvantage communities (Helali et al., 2022). With regards to this study, the Bagan Datuk district is not heavily population and the agriculture remains the staple income for the community. As more and more residents migrate elsewhere, the remaining people would still have to rely on farming and agriculture for their livelihood. Thus, strategies to reinforce youth fidelity are important to ensure that capacity building can continue and social inclusion and local stability.

Together with the theory of planned behavior for youth fidelity towards successful socio-economic outcomes. As stated by Campbell and Edwards (2012), youth in rural areas might not have a variety of opportunities for development, but aligning the community leader's strategies and leveraging the local resources through relevant university and industry engagements will result in socio-economic gains.

Methodology

An exploratory design formed the study's methodology with respondents restricted to the district of Bagan Datuk, Perak, Malaysia. As stated by Dudovskiy (2022), exploratory research is to investigate a problem that is not clearly defined to understand the problem in a better light. In other words, the investigation undertaken is "merely to explore the research questions and does not intend to offer final and conclusive solutions to existing problems" (ibid). To put it simply, the exploratory research design has been undertaken to determine the varying levels of depth to the issue of the youths' efforts and contributions to the socioeconomic development of their community, as well as gauging their interests in entrepreneurship activities. Mainly, the qualitative design was employed, particularly with the open-ended questions. For the scope, the communities in the district of Bagan Datuk, Perak, became the case study. The motivation for the case study began in November 2020

when two community heads asked for assistance in determining the interests and needs of the working-age generation for capacity development in the district. Thus, the research objective is to explore the barriers to social mobility to ensure youth fidelity in the district of Bagan Datuk, Perak, Malaysia. With that, the research questions for this study were:

- 1) What would make the youths interested in community development?
- 2) What are entrepreneurship activities of interest to them?
- 3) What are the youths' contributions to capacity building for Bagan Datuk, Perak?

The sample size for the project involved one percent of the 70,000 population of Bagan Datuk identified through a non-probability sampling technique: snowball sampling. This technique was appropriate as the respondents could only be reached through their various Whatsapp groups. Further, the residents' data were unavailable and not current, as responded to by the youth officer in charge of the district. The snowball sampling or chain-referral sampling has allowed for an adequate number of respondents, which is more than one-third of the sample size of 100 (n=100). As for the instrument for collecting primary data, an online survey link was sent to the respondents via the Whatsapp messaging group. The online survey used Google Forms the gauge demographic statistics with open-ended questions focused on the three research questions. The data collection took six months to achieve a 66% response rate from 100 respondents.

Findings

The findings from the 66% returned responses will be detailed via their demographic profiles (Table 1) before focusing on answering the three research questions.

Table 1

Demographic profiles of respondents

| Item | Responses | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------------|-------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Gender | Male | 29 | 44.6 |
| | Female | 36 | 55.4 |
| Age range | 19-25 years | 5 | 7.7 |
| | 26-35 years | 20 | 30.8 |
| | 36-45 years | 18 | 27.7 |
| | 46 years and above | 22 | 33.8 |
| Qualification | High school certificate (SPM) | 32 | 49.2 |
| | Diploma | 9 | 13.8 |
| | Undergraduate | 17 | 26.2 |
| | Others | 7 | 10.8 |
| Marital status | Single (Never been married) | 14 | 21.5 |
| | Married | 46 | 70.8 |
| | Single parent | 5 | 7.7 |

From Table 1, the female gender responded more than the opposite sex at 55.4% to 44.6%, indicating there more interest in the survey was elicited from the ladies. For the age range, more respondents above the youth age bracket were shown at 33.8% (46 years old and

above). Those aged 19-25 had 7.7% replied, the lowest for the variable. In the age range of 26-35 years, 30.8% were in that range, followed by 36-45 years at 27.7%. The delineation for the youth age range of 19-45 years showed a combined of 66.2%. The educational background or qualification of the respondents indicated that 49.2% do not have a diploma or undergraduate degree. On the contrary, the marital status of the respondents showed that 70.8% are married, with 21.5% unmarried and 7.7% single parent.

For research question one, on the youth interest in community development, the open-ended question avoided the responses, as shown in Figure 3 below. From the feedback, 53.8% would like to go into entrepreneurial activities, followed by agriculture at 36.9% and aquaculture at 21.5%. However, 41.5% would like to do online business, with 38.5% like to be involved in culinary activities. Interest in tourism evoked a 30.8% response.

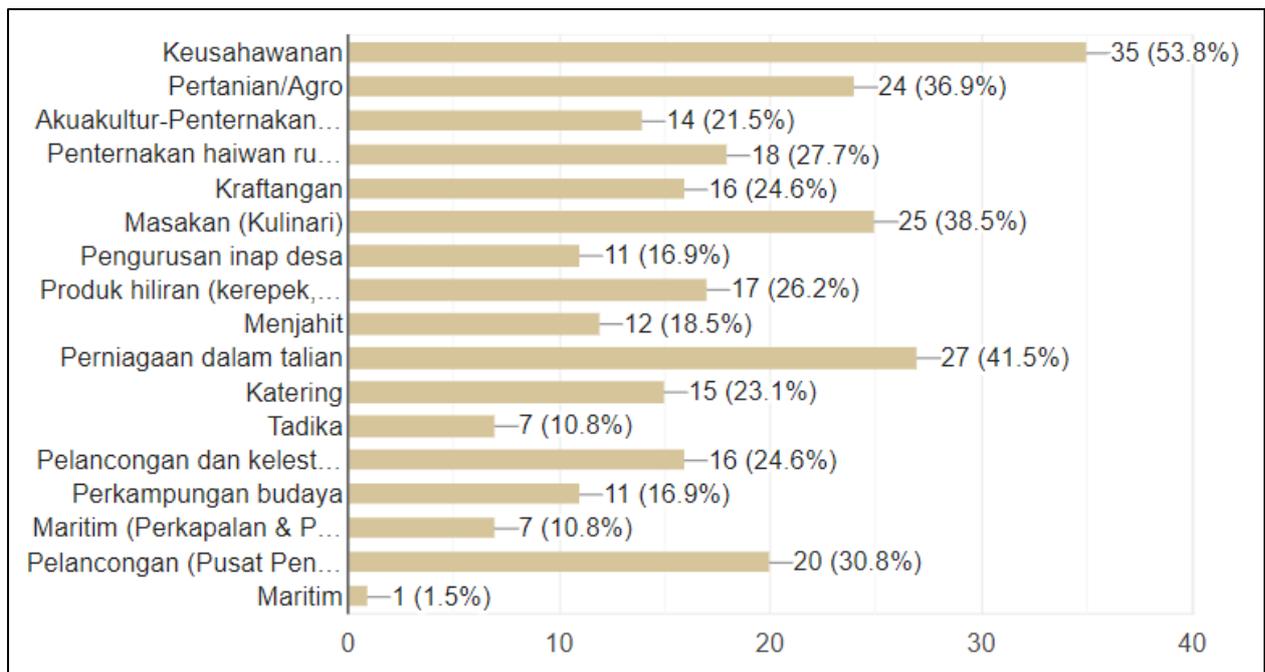


Figure 3-Interests in contributing to community development

As for research question two, 53.8% (see Figure 3) again indicated that the respondents have vital interests in entrepreneurship, such as arts and crafts (24.6%), homestay (16.9%), dressmaking or tailoring (18.5%), food catering (23.1%), kindergarten business (10.8%) and indigenous food production, 26.2%.

The youths' contribution to capacity building for the Bagan Datuk district (RQ3) required two different responses: financial literacy workshops to hone their skills and the timeframe for the workshops. The responses are shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2

The youths' capacity building requirement

| Statement | Responses | Frequency | Percentage |
|--|------------------|-----------|------------|
| For entrepreneurship success, do you have adequate financial literacy knowledge? | Yes, adequate | 3 | 4.9% |
| | Yes, just enough | 24 | 39.3% |
| | No knowledge | 34 | 55.7% |
| How much time would be sufficient for having the financial literacy workshop? | One day | 30 | 46.2% |
| | Two days | 29 | 44.6% |
| | Half a day | 6 | 9.2% |

The following section will discuss the implications of the findings and provide recommendations for further study.

Discussion and Conclusion

From the above findings, the evidence to support the research questions and research problem was adequately furnished. The overall population of Bagan Datuk indicated an aging community but catering to the next generation for socioeconomic development is crucial. The demographic profiles for youths below 35 years of age who would like to contribute to community development do not equate to the state government's actual, realistic strategic plans or the district chieftains. With a small percentage of youths wanting significant involvement in their community and villages, there should be more feedback over time. Times have changed, and the aftermath of the pandemic has slowed down the country's economy. However, life has to go on, and the youths must play a more significant part in ensuring that their community's livelihood and well-being are sustainable. Again, referring to the feedback on entrepreneurship interests, that is the adequate motivation for the district leaders to cater to the younger generation's needs. To reiterate, the endemic phase has put food security as a national priority. Food means agriculture. Thus the focus on agricultural and aqua cultural entrepreneurship is essential for the way forward for this district and any other districts. Being an entrepreneur will hone the youths' leadership skills, but with work mobility, the draining of the human resource from Bagan Datuk has to be curbed. There is enhanced fidelity when youths want to stay and assist their community. Thus, the study's findings explored why youths' social mobility and fidelity will significantly affect the community's socioeconomic development. To sustain the drain of human capital, the community leaders must cater to the youth interests by collaborating with relevant agencies and policymakers to provide the necessary assistance for sustainable entrepreneurship in Bagan Datuk, Perak.

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