

Exploring Socioeconomic Landscape: A survey dataset analysis of household income among Malaysian public higher learning institution students

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Abstract

This study focuses on the socioeconomic aspects of household income among students in Malaysian Public Higher Learning Institutions. This study employs a survey research design with 30,527 respondents from 14 states in Malaysia. The findings reveal various income brackets and shed light on the financial challenges students face while pursuing higher education. This study emphasizes the importance of understanding socioeconomic dynamics within higher education institutions to address equity gaps and enhance support for students from diverse economic backgrounds. It provides a framework for targeted interventions and policies to promote equal opportunities and inclusive learning environments in Malaysia's public higher education institutions.

Keywords: Malaysia Public Higher Learning Institution, household income, Pandemic COVID-19, socioeconomic landscape.

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1.0 Introduction

Students' educational careers have been interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic on a global scale. Closing college campuses and transferring classes online has put a strain on students, made studying more technologically challenging, and caused serious worries for those students who rely on college housing, meal plans, jobs, and other help to keep safe and secure. In addition, the epidemic has abruptly altered the economic climate that many students rely on to sustain financial support for their education. Overnight, jobs and internships that guaranteed students' financial security while they were studying have disappeared (Altindag, Filiz & Tekin, 2021; Aucejo, French, Ugalde Araya & Zafar, 2020; Bird, Castleman & Lohner, 2020; Jaeger et al., 2021; Kofoed, Gebhart, Gilmore & Moschitto, 2021;

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Balkis Awang, 2023). Before past studies on worldwide study of the covid 19 pandemic effect on global learning education, this social study focuses on social economic phenomena surrounding Malaysia Public Higher learning institution students' household income.

2.0 Literature Review

Households in Malaysia have been divided into three different income groups. Top 20% (T20) Middle 40% and Bottom 40% (B40). The definitions of T20, M40, and B40 are based on the Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM, 2022) and the level of income for every group has increased throughout the years; indicating economic growth. According to the Household Income and Basic Amenity Survey 2014 by DOSM, the T20 (top 20%) income group is the household that has a household income above RM8,319 (USD2,377). The M40 (middle 40%) income groups have a household income ranging between RM3,856 (USD1,102) and RM8,318 (USD2,376). Meanwhile, B40 (bottom 40%) income groups are the household earning monthly income below RM3,855 (USD1,101). In Malaysia, the Covid-19 pandemic has reduced household income and pushed more people into poverty. According to the Malaysian Department of Statistics, the number of impoverished families climbed to 639,800 in 2020, up from 405,400 in 2019 (Malay Mail, 2021). According to Chief Statistician Datuk Seri Mohd Uzir Mahidin, the incidence of absolute poverty increased from 5.6% in 2019 to 8.4% in 2020, and the incidence of hardcore poverty is expected to rise from 0.4% (2019) involving 27,200 households to 1.0% involving 78,000 households. He added that the pandemic had also changed the composition of household groupings, with 20% of M40 households earning between RM4,850 and RM10,959 moving to the B40 category. Mohd Uzir stated that the average monthly household gross income decreased by negative 10.3 percent to RM7,089 in 2019 from RM7,901 in 2018 and that the decrease was contributed by households or individuals who experienced income loss or reduction, particularly those with the status of employee, self-employed, or others. This is because education holds the key to assisting a B40 family in improving their livelihood and breaking free from the shackles of poverty. It is claimed that persons in the B40 group will not be able to advance their status after losing academic prospects since pay or salary is based on academic degrees. The greatest concern is when B40 families are unable to improve their living conditions owing to a lack of education, making it more difficult for them to break the cycle of poverty.

This study examines Malaysian households' post-pandemic Public Higher Learning Institution Student income, the rising cost of living, and other comparable nations with similar characteristics and situations. This study's data findings can help to improve data preparedness and fix data gaps to create a comprehensive dataset for Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) implementation by 2030. Malaysia aspires to achieve Zero Poverty (SDG Goal 1). This goal seeks to eradicate poverty in all of its manifestations throughout the world by developing strong policy frameworks at the national, regional, and international levels to encourage increased investment in poverty-eradication efforts. Furthermore, maintaining low inflation and a comfortable quality of living will help Malaysia achieve the SDG 2030 of equity in economic growth and equitable opportunity for all Malaysians, regardless of gender or location.

As a result, this article will discuss the respondents' (students at public higher education institutions) academic clustering in comparison to their father, who serves as their sole source of income, as well as his employment position and income level.

3.0 Methodology

This study employed a survey research design to gather data from 30,527 active students enrolled in Malaysian Public Higher Learning Institutions across all 14 states in Malaysia, including Johor, Kedah, Kelantan, Melaka, Negeri Sembilan, Pahang, Pulau Pinang, Perak, Perlis, Selangor, Terengganu, Sabah, Sarawak, and Wilayah Persekutuan Kuala Lumpur from August 2021 until Jan 2022. Data collection involved administering a comprehensive survey via questionnaires, followed by a thorough data analysis. The survey distribution was facilitated in collaboration with the Academic Affairs Department of Higher Education throughout Malaysia. The research parameters, data collection methods, and data source locations are further delineated in Figure 1: Research Design.

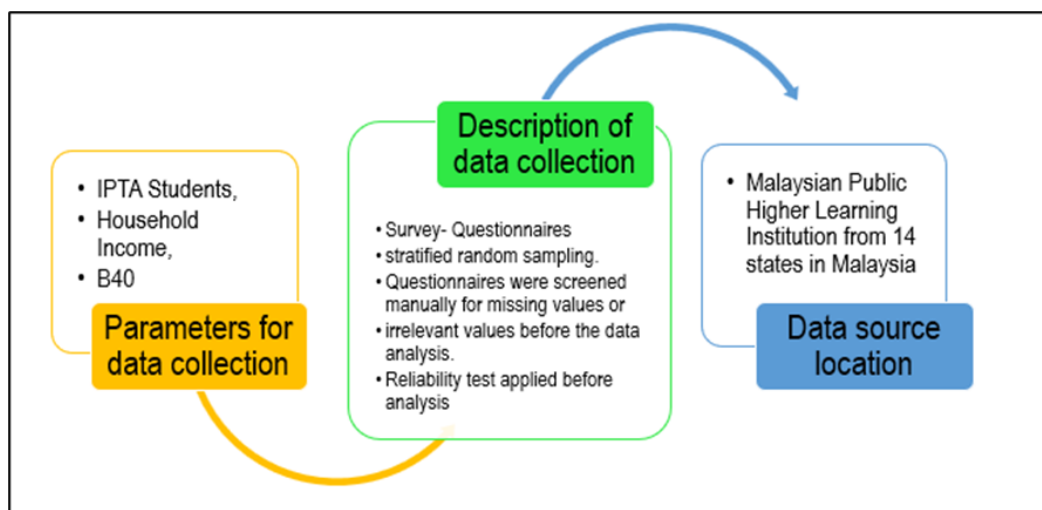


Figure 1: Research Design

Data were gathered using a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into several sections.

- Section 1: Respondents Analysis-to obtain demographic information from respondents (Students).
- Section 2: Student Employment Analysis – to assess the financial status of the respondents (Students).
- Section 3: Employment Status of Student's Father – to gather information about household income.

The data were qualitatively analyzed and presented in tables. Ethical consideration in the research process was ensured because administering the questionnaires to respondents was based on their willingness to respond to the research instrument.

Value of the Data

- The data will be useful for analyzing post-pandemic Public Higher Learning Institution students of Malaysian households income, about the increasing cost of living and other comparable countries having the same features and situation.
- The data is valuable for further research to formulate a strategic program on poverty alleviation and increase the standard of living affecting Public Higher Learning Institution students of Malaysia.
- The data can be used by policymakers and researchers to understand the importance of the interrelationship between incomes, price, and consumption expenditure of households towards attaining a better standard of living for Public Higher Learning institution students of Malaysia.

4.0 Findings

Finding discussions are divided into three (3) sections, 1) Respondents Analysis- demographic information from respondents (Students), 2) Student Father Employment Analysis, and 3) Income Category of Student's Father Who is Working.

4.1 Demographic Public Higher Learning Institution Student of Malaysian

The survey was conducted nationwide through a comprehensive questionnaire with the primary aim of gathering insights from students attending Malaysia's Public Higher Learning Institutions regarding their present household income status. A substantial total of 30,527 respondents actively participated by responding to the distributed questionnaires. Notably, the central region of Malaysia, specifically Selangor, boasted the highest respondent count, totaling 12,788, closely followed by the Northern Region encompassing Perlis, Kedah, Pulau Pinang, and Perak. On average, each state garnered representation from more than 40 survey participants, as detailed in Table 1.

Table 1: Respondents by Region and state.

REGION	TOTAL RESPONDENTS	
CENTRAL	12788	
Shah Alam		7041
Selangor		5747
NORTHERN	6507	
Perlis		1715
Kedah		1273
Pulau Pinang		1118
Perak		2401
SOUTHERN	5239	
Negeri Sembilan		2280
Melaka		1778
Johor		1181
EAST COAST	3943	
Kelantan		1546
Terengganu		1096
Pahang		1301
EAST MALAYSIA	2050	
Sabah		817
Sarawak		1233
GRAND TOTAL	30527	30527

Due to several factors, science and technology courses often incur significant expenses for students. Firstly, the specialized nature of these courses necessitates the acquisition of costly textbooks, laboratory materials, and software licenses. Additionally, students may

be required to invest in personal devices, such as scientific calculators or high-performance laptop computers. Moreover, supplementary expenses may arise from field trips, internships, and research projects, encompassing costs such as airfare and accommodations.

Table 2: Responses by Academic Clusters

CLUSTER	FREQUENCY	%
Science and Technology	12607	41.3%
Business and Management	11645	38.1%
Social Science and Humanities	4384	14.4%
Academic Centres	1891	6.2%
Total	30527	100.0%

Furthermore, class sizes in scientific and technological courses are often smaller, resulting in greater tuition costs. This could explain why so many students with science and technology backgrounds were eager to participate in this study.

4.2 Student Father Employment Analysis

Fathers are commonly perceived as primary breadwinners in various societies, including Malaysia. At the time these questionnaires were distributed, the COVID-19 pandemic was reaching its peak, instigating widespread fears of job loss and retrenchment. This investigation revealed that among the 4,888 respondents, the fathers of a significant portion were unemployed due to the pandemic's impact on their jobs. Notably, 6.2% of students, totaling 1,884 individuals, were identified as orphans, having lost either one or both parents. This demographic faces economic instability, with family financial support remaining elusive for some. Many students in this situation resort to depending on relatives, subsidies, local scholarships, or waqf support to sustain their academic pursuits. Additionally, a considerable number of students opt for part-time employment, adapting to the challenges of learning amid the pandemic.

Table 3: Employment Status of Student's Father

EMPLOYMENT STATUS OF THE STUDENT'S FATHER	FREQUENCY	%
Working	23755	77.8%
Not Working	4888	16.0%
Students An Orphan	1884	6.2%
Total	30527	100.0%

This condition causes a variety of problems, including time management. Students with part-time jobs struggle to attend online classes during the pandemic because they lack the motivation and courage to participate, while others suffer with time management since their work conflicts with their class schedule (Awi etc, 2020)

4.3 Income Category of Student's Father Who is Working

While the number of working fathers is fairly large, 23,755 with a frequency of 77.8%, more than 15 thousand (63.6%) were in the lowest income bracket, earning less than RM2,500 (refer to Table 4).

Table 4: Income Category of Student's Father Who is Working

WORKING FATHERS	FREQUENCY	%
BELOW RM2,500	15113	63.6%
RM2,500-RM3,169	2857	12.0%
RM3,170 – RM3,969	1415	6.0%
RM3,970 – RM4,849	1134	4.8%
RM4,850 – RM5,879	982	4.1%
RM5,880 – RM7,099	830	3.5%
RM7,100 – RM8,699	527	2.2%
RM8,700 - RM10,959	445	1.9%
RM10,960 – RM15,039	286	1.2%
ABOVE RM15,040	166	0.7%
TOTAL	23755	100.0%

The table presents insightful details regarding the demographic makeup of employed fathers, with a specific emphasis on their income distribution. Initially, it is evident that a considerable cohort of working fathers, comprising 23,755 individuals, exists. However, a noteworthy observation emerges as a substantial proportion (63.6%) of these working fathers earns less than RM2,500, signifying a pronounced concentration in the lower income stratum. Secondly, despite the overall sizeable population of working fathers, the

prevalence of a significant majority in the lowest income bracket suggests potential economic disparities or challenges within this demographic.

According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia's (DOSM) Household Income and Basic Amenities Survey Report 2020, 20% of households from the M40 group have dropped into the B40 group as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic aftermath. The M40 income earners, often known as the "new poor," (Bernama, 2022) are claimed to be hanging on by a thread, with some even falling into poverty. If this is a new phenomenon, what has become of people who were originally part of the B40 group? How far will they sink? The thought of a family managing RM2,500 a month is unsettling indeed.

Many students were forced to adjust their approach and ideas on education and learning attempts as a result of financial and economic insecurity in their lives. Many people decide to discontinue their studies and focus on life survival by working part-time to support themselves and, in severe cases, their families. Taking into account economic stability and mental/health sustainability, many students were forced to reconsider their future endeavors during the pandemic. However, the post-pandemic period has shed new light on this occurrence.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

Socioeconomic factors wield a substantial influence on a student's capacity to thrive and cultivate a positive overall experience within the college or university environment. Firstly, individuals hailing from less affluent socioeconomic backgrounds may encounter challenges in covering tuition and other educational expenses. The financial burden, necessitating prolonged work hours or the juggling of multiple part-time jobs to meet financial obligations, can profoundly impact academic performance and campus engagement. This strain may hinder the ability to afford fundamental necessities like housing, food, and transportation, potentially leading to housing instability or food insecurity, thereby impeding focused academic pursuits and participation in campus activities.

Secondly, these socioeconomic challenges can adversely affect mental and emotional well-being. Students grappling with financial difficulties and academic pressure may experience heightened stress and anxiety, potentially compromising their mental health. This, in turn, could escalate into social isolation over time. It is imperative to acknowledge that students facing financial hardships may perceive themselves as isolated or excluded from social activities that entail a financial commitment. The resultant feelings of loneliness and isolation could detrimentally impact their overall well-being.

Hence, creating an inclusive and supportive campus environment that accommodates students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds is crucial for their success in higher education. Such an environment fosters a sense of belonging, reduces stressors related to financial insecurity, and promotes equitable access to resources. It encourages collaboration, enriching students' perspectives and enhancing their academic experiences. Additionally, support services tailored to socioeconomic diversity can help students overcome challenges, increasing retention rates and graduation rates. Ultimately, this inclusive approach not only benefits individual students but also contributes to a more diverse, equitable, and enriched educational community that prepares students for a globalized workforce.

Furthermore, the post-COVID-19 economic upswing opens up new opportunities for Malaysian students at higher education institutions. To begin, work market trends might vary, with some industries facing reorganization while others grow. This emphasizes the need to adjust to changing job environments and gain in-demand skills. Skills in digital technology, data analysis, cybersecurity, and e-commerce will be in high demand. Students that specialize in these areas will have more job options and career opportunities.

A focus on sustainability and green efforts also emerges during the recovery phase, opening up opportunities for students majoring in environmental sciences, renewable energy, and sustainable business practices. Students with interdisciplinary knowledge and expertise will have more opportunities as a result of the integration of technology across numerous industries. Additionally, as sectors shift and look for new solutions, there will be a greater need for critical thinking, problem-solving, and adaptability. This is because entrepreneurship and innovation are likely to be supported, as they can help to spur economic growth and employment creation. To create internships, research partnerships, and experiential learning opportunities, collaboration between academia and industry will be essential. Programs for career development and financial aid will be essential in assisting students in joining the workforce and promoting economic recovery.

In conclusion, as we navigate the challenges and opportunities of a post-COVID-19 world, it is clear that students who proactively align their education, determination, and skills with these emerging trends are poised to lead the way in economic recovery. This is not just a chance for personal advantage but an opportunity to contribute to the broader rebuilding of our society. By staying adaptable and forward-thinking, our students can not only thrive individually but also play a vital role in shaping a more resilient and innovative future for us all.

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