

Gender and Education: The Case of High Male Dropout Rate

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Background: The provision of universal primary and secondary education in Malaysia has contributed to the achievement of Target 3 of the Millennium Development Goal on universality of primary education, and Target 4 on gender balance in education. Since the beginning of the 1990s, female enrolment rates have exceeded those of males at all levels of education. The high dropout rate among the males is an issue of concern. The objective of this paper is to explore the gender profile in education in Malaysia.

Methods: This paper analyzes the dropout rate using nationally representative data, extracted from the 2000 census and published reports on the 2010 censuses. The focus is on the youth aged 11-19 years old, which covers the transitional period of one level of education to the next level.

Results: The dropout rate has generally reduced from 2000 to 2010. However, a finer examination reveals increased dropouts among the males, particularly those aged 10-14. This trend is striking for those residing in urban areas. Male dropout rate is consistently higher at every single age from 11-19 compared to the females. Before transition to tertiary education, only less than one third remains in the school system. The results also suggest a higher likelihood to remain in education once an individual completes secondary education.

Implications: Gender imbalance in education has both economic and social consequences. The issue is to develop strategies that prevent dropouts among males in the school system. Changes are necessary to make school climate more appealing to the male youths. Their behavioral and learning problems must be identified. Gender roles should be redefined to prevent deterioration of human capital. Beyond curriculum design, there is a need for collaboration and integration with social support services to formulate intervention strategies to prevent dropouts from engaging in non-productive activities.

Keywords: Dropout, Education, Gender Imbalance, School