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## **Patterns and Factors of Intergenerational Social Mobility by Education: A Case of Malay Agricultural Community in FELDA Trolak Utara, Perak, Malaysia**

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### **Abstract**

This study discusses the issues of intergenerational social mobility by education experienced by two generations of Malay families in a Malay agricultural community namely, FELDA Trolak Utara, Perak, Malaysia. The objectives of the study are to examine the patterns of social mobility and to analyse the socio-cultural factors that are responsible for the different patterns of intergenerational social mobility by education experienced by two generations of the Malay family organizations in FELDA. The study involved fieldwork conducted from December 2014 to August 2015 for a period of nine months. The study employed the qualitative method using participant observation and in-depth interviews, using an interview schedule with thirty families and two FELDA key personalities. The same informants were interviewed again in a follow-up study conducted in November and December 2022 to explore changes that might happen especially during the post-pandemic period which involved only e-mails, telephone calls, or text messages. The findings of the study show that the majority of the informants experienced a pattern of upward intergenerational social mobility in terms of their level of education. Although horizontal intergenerational social mobility was also

observed, nevertheless the cases were very limited in number. Interestingly, no notable change in the pattern was found in the follow-up study during the post-pandemic period. Social factors such as family institutions, major roles played by the Malaysian government, and individuals' positive attitudes towards education in particular, had contributed to the immense incidence of upward intergenerational social mobility. On the other hand, intractable factors such as war, poverty, religious beliefs, and cultural traditions were found to be the obstacles faced by the first-generation informants in particular. This study provides some fresh and interesting insights into the sociological body of knowledge, especially in intergenerational social mobility studies. Finally, this study further suggests a number of possible avenues for future research on intergenerational social mobility that could not be covered by this study. This includes comparative studies among different ethnic groups and areas of residence and large-scale studies using a quantitative approach.

**Keywords:** Social Mobility, Education, Roles of Government, Family Institutions, Positive Attitudes.

### Introduction

Intergenerational social mobility is a ubiquitous issue discerned in both developing and developed countries (Heckman & Landersø, 2022; Saidon et al., 2022). Intergenerational social mobility involves a number of issues, including its patterns and determinants, which include education, socio-cultural issues, and religion (Juma & Simatwa, 2014; Dyhouse, 2001; Sorokin, 1959). Social mobility is defined as individuals' ability to change their social positions within the social hierarchy that entails changes, either upward or downward, or even stagnant movement of individuals' strata (Abrahamson et al., 1976: 203; Idris, 2004: 89; Sorokin, 1959: 133). Malaysia is not exempted from discussing the aforementioned matters. Malaysia has undergone numerous social, economic, and political changes since its independence in 1957. Globalization, modernization, migration, urbanisation, and industrialization were all possible causes of the changes (Othman et al., 2009). In relation to this, it is relevant to shed some light on the said issue among the agricultural community in Malaysia.

There is a government agency called Federal Land Development Authority (FELDA) which was established on the 1st of July 1956 with the aim to relocate the poor's settlement, eradicate rural poverty, and to effectively manage land development projects that are primarily agricultural-based such as oil palm and rubber plantation (Mokhles, 2014; FELDA, 2021). To date, FELDA became a model for many countries abroad due to its massive accomplishment in various fields such as manufacturing, transportation, research and development projects specialized in crop protection, tissue culture, plant breeding and agronomy, stock exchange market, transportation, tourism, and hotel management (Barau & Said, 2016; Feldaglobal, 2014).

Besides that, FELDA also aimed to produce high-quality human capital by providing adequate educational facilities and funds, as well as scholarships and loans, from primary school until higher education which indirectly shifting our focus to the issue of social mobility (FELDA, 2021). This study focuses on two generations of FELDA residing in Trolak Utara, Perak, including the first generation, who were the first residents who migrated to the settlement when it was established in 1973, aged 57 to 74, and their children, aged 24 to 54.

### Statement of The Problem

Malaysian government has emphasized the importance of producing quality human capital through training and education since the country's independence in 1957. In the 2022

budget, RM67.1 billion is largely allocated for education and RM6.6 billion for technical and vocational education and training (Ministry of Finance Malaysia, 2022). This demonstrates the government's commitment to produce human capital for the sake of the country's development. This is due to the fact that education plays a major role in the issue of social mobility. However, although related studies were found in several Malaysian communities, particularly in urban, agricultural, and fishing communities (Idris, 2004; Rose et al., 2011; Sa'at et al., 2017), studies on FELDA's intergenerational social mobility were limited. Given the fact that Malaysian government has provided adequate educational infrastructures and funded various educational and training schemes and programmes from primary until tertiary education at both national and FELDA levels (Bakar, 2013; Ismail, 2011; Khan, 2014; Sarifudin, 2010), hence, it is imperative to analyse the role of education and, in particular, how far it could have explained the issue of intergenerational social mobility within the FELDA scheme. It is vital because it can provide some insights into whether the government's efforts affect the lives of the FELDA generations in comparison to their parents'.

### **Research Objectives**

The study aims to achieve the following objectives

- 1- To examine the patterns of social mobility by education experienced by two generations of the Malay family organizations in FELDA Trolak Utara, Perak, Malaysia.
- 2- To analyse the socio-cultural factors that are responsible for the different patterns of intergenerational social mobility by education experienced by two generations of the Malay family organizations in FELDA Trolak Utara, Perak, Malaysia.

### **Significance of The Study**

The study aims to examine the social mobility patterns that occur between two generations in a FELDA settlement, specifically located at FELDA Trolak Utara in Perak, Malaysia. The reason of choosing the said location is due to its organized settlement and existing educational infrastructures within the area. This type of study is uncommon in mobility research because most of it focuses on fishing communities. Hence, this study may add new input to the sociological body of knowledge, particularly in the areas of family, social change, and development, because it attempts to study the patterns of social mobility by education experienced by two generations of FELDA settlers and the socio-cultural factors that lead to the occurrence of the said patterns. The findings will provide a significant contribution to future generations by providing guidelines in improving social mobility and education levels as well as producing holistic and high-quality human capital development.

### **Methodology**

#### **Research Design**

This study is a qualitative study that used the ethnographic approach. It is an approach that aims to clarify and interpret the shared and learned patterns of behaviours, beliefs, values, and language of a culture-sharing group. The study employed the qualitative method using participant observation and in-depth interviews, using interview schedule. Qualitative study was relevant to be used since it could provide detailed insights regarding the informants' experience related to the aspect of education within social mobility issue. This enabled the researchers to understand how the informants interpret their experience, what are the meanings they attribute to such experience, and how it made a difference in their lives throughout the entire intergenerational social mobility process. Furthermore, it also offered

rich and detailed information regarding the shared patterns of a culture-sharing group i.e., the Malays. This is pertinent since some unique socio-cultural beliefs or practices of this ethnic group might influence different patterns of social mobility by education to occur.

### **Location of Study**

The study took place in a FELDA settlement named FELDA Trolak Utara, Perak, Malaysia. It was established in 1973 and was a home to a variety of ethnic groups. The primary reason for selecting this location was due to its organized and well-planned dispersion of settlers' houses and facilities, especially the educational facilities within the area. Furthermore, because of the existing systematic data available from the FELDA office, it was convenient to trace information about the first and second generations of the settlers.

### **Sample and Sampling Techniques**

The settlement had 475 registered households, including 459 Malay families, 16 Indian families, and only 1 Chinese family. Like any other qualitative studies, the samples chosen for this study was purposive. This was due to the fact that the current study only intended to observe the Malay ethnic group in relation to intergenerational social mobility issue. Thus, purposive sampling was aptly suitable to provide information about the informants and research problems under examination. The researchers also used snowball sampling strategy by asking the gatekeeper for referrals in thorough selection of the samples, particularly for the in-depth interview purposes. Participant observation generally involved all Malay settlers living in the said settlement while the in-depth interviews involved only 30 Malay families and 2 FELDA officers. However, in answering the 2 objectives of this study, only data from in-depth interviews was discussed due to its apt relevance, with data from participant observation being excluded.

Malay families with two generations (both the first and second generations for each family) who were available for interviews were chosen. The children interviewed were both settlement residents and those who lived outside but were able to spend some time being interviewed when they returned to visit their parents at the settlement. It is essential to include the two generations because it did not only provide rich and detailed information about their social mobility experiences, but it also allowed the researchers to do cross-checks, particularly on certain issues that required specific information in order to answer the research objectives, namely patterns of social mobility in terms of the educational aspect and the determining factors.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

The informants had the freedom to choose the location, date, and time of the interviews based on their available time. The interviews were typically conducted in an informal and casual setting, such as over cups of tea. The first-generation informants, in particular, preferred to be approached at their homes on weekday mornings. It was the best time to start conversations with them because most of them were retired and no longer worked at the oil palm plantation, and thus, they were available at their homes. On the other hand, the second-generation informants preferred to be interviewed on weekends, when they were not working and visiting their parents in the settlement.

The researchers distributed the participant information sheet and consent form to all of the informants prior to the start of each interview session so that they could understand the nature, objectives, and scope of the research. Furthermore, it aided them in coming up with

some ideas to discuss during the interviews. They were assured that the data collected in the field would be kept confidential and used solely for academic purposes, and that they could opt to withdraw at any time.

The interview schedule used was based on social mobility questions, which were divided into two types: closed-ended and open-ended questions. The close-ended questions primarily consisted of the informants' biodata, such as their age, level of education, marital status, place of residence, family size, and number of children. These close-ended questions provided the information for the first research objective, which was to identify the patterns of intergenerational social mobility by education experienced by the informants. Meanwhile, the open-ended questions concerned how the informants elaborated their experience throughout the process and what are the socio-cultural factors that contributed to it.

An MP3 recorder were used during the interviews because it allowed the researchers to capture all of the important details told by the informants. To be more specific, it was important to accurately record each informant's level of education because it provided answers to the first research objective: patterns of intergenerational social mobility by education. Because all of the first-generation informants had a large number of children, the researchers had to deal with a large amount of information, which would be securely retained by using the MP3 recorder. The MP3 recorder, however, was only used with the informants' permission. It was fortunate that all of the informants agreed to it. Note-taking during the interviews was avoided for fear of appearing impolite, especially among the older informants.

As a sign of respect, eye contact was always maintained during the interviews and reacted appropriately to their responses. All of the interviews were conducted in Malay, and the researchers even used the dialect of the northern states to communicate with the informants at times since majority of them spoke the said dialect. They were especially friendly and felt closer to the researchers because of it. As a result, the interviews gained a tremendous rich and valuable data. The researchers also made an effort to visit some of the key informants on a regular basis to ensure the validity and reliability of the information gleaned from previous interviews.

The same informants were interviewed again in the follow-up study in November and December 2022 to explore changes that might happen especially during the post Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) period. However, the interview sessions were conducted only through e-mails, telephone calls, or text messages.

### **Data Analysis**

The researchers spent a great amount of time transcribing all of the information obtained from the interviews. This was critical in order to facilitate the process of identifying and coding. The themes identified from the interviews were systematically coded using the Atlas.ti 7 software. The coding system was extremely helpful in categorising and connecting the themes until it was able to make sense of the data and analyse it in order to understand the issues of social mobility experienced by the informants.

The triangulation procedure was useful in providing detailed data because first-generation informants were sometimes unsure about certain details about their children and vice versa. In fact, it also allows cross-checks in order to identify certain issues that required specific information particularly patterns, process, and socio-cultural factors of social mobility by education.



## Literature Review

Social mobility refers to individuals' ability to change their social positions within the social hierarchy. It entails changes, either upward or downward movement of individuals' strata. There are two types of social mobility: horizontal and vertical mobility. Horizontal social mobility denotes a state of inactivity in which individuals' social positions do not change. Vertical social mobility, on the other hand, refers to individuals moving up or down the social strata (Abrahamson et al., 1976: 203; Sorokin, 1959: 133). Sorokin's (1959) theory of social mobility further elaborates the said multidimensionality as prevalent in almost all societies, vertical mobility is a common phenomenon, the extent of strata and amount of people who traverse are to be measured, fluctuation of mobility patterns are expected, and there are no fixed mobility patterns in the history of man due to many obstacles.

In relation to social mobility, Fields (2004) described its three different aspects. First, mobility includes both intergenerational, which refers to a comparison made between two generations, i.e., between parents and children, and intragenerational, which refers to an individual's mobility change measured at two different times. Second, mobility could be studied at both the micro and macro levels. Individuals and households serve as indicators at the micro level. Meanwhile, at the macro level, structural analysis is carried out, which leads to national or even international levels. Finally, the third aspect includes social and economic status, such as education, occupation, and income, as indicators of social mobility.

There is no doubt that education is one of the most powerful predictors of social mobility. The origin-education-destination (OED) triangle theory was the theory that stresses education's critical role in determining an individual's social status or social destination (Goldthorpe, 2007). Many past studies have shown that education has a substantial impact on people's socio-economic status, particularly their income (Gao & Smyth, 2015; Harun et al., 2017; Morikawa, 2015; Mphuka & Simumba, 2012). In other words, higher academic achievement leads to higher income. Besides that, parental awareness and involvement in their children's education further help to strengthen social mobility (Chen, 2017; Hedges et al., 2016; Osman, 2005; Zedan, 2012). This includes parents' beliefs on the importance of education, moral support, and keen supervision while the children do their homework or assignments at home. In addition, parental investment in the form of financial support is also imperative in ensuring children's educational mobility (HSBC, 2017; Rashid et al., 2011; Schroeder et al., 2015).

Apart from that, it is also necessary to highlight some of the obstacles that can impede one's social mobility. The challenges include poverty (Adam et al., 2016; Mansur et al., 2009; Mawere, 2012), lack of awareness of the importance of education (Arif et al., 2008; Wabike, 2012) and religious and cultural traditions (Bayisenge, 2010; Juma & Simatwa, 2014; Lyndon et al., 2012; Njie et al., 2015; Sekine & Hodgkin, 2017).

**Research Findings and Discussions****Patterns of Intergenerational Social Mobility by Education**

Table 1

*Informants' Level of Education (First and Second Generations)*

Level of Education	First Generation	Percentage (%)	Second Generation	Percentage (%)
No schooling	2	7	4	2
Primary	23	77	0	0
Secondary	5	16	152	64
Tertiary	0	0	77	32
Post graduate	0	0	4	2
Total	30	100	237	100

Table 1 demonstrates that 2 (7%) of the first-generation informants had no formal education, 23 (77%) had only primary education, and just 5 (16%) had completed upper secondary education. None of them had completed tertiary or post graduate education. On the other hand, only 4 (2%) of the second generation had no formal education, whereas 152 (64%) had a secondary education, 77 (32%) had a tertiary education, and 4 (2%) had a postgraduate education. Surprisingly, none of the second generation received only primary education, as seen in Table 1. In conclusion, between the two FELDA generations, there is a clear upward intergenerational pattern of social mobility in connection to their educational attainment.

**Factors of Intergenerational Social Mobility by Education****Findings Based on First Generation**

War, poverty, religious beliefs, and cultural traditions were all the factors inculcated by the first generation for their poor educational achievement.

**War**

War factor is evident for those who had lived during the Japanese occupation in Malaya (Malaysia was called Malaya before its independence in 1957) in the 1940s. Wardah (pseudonym), a 74-year-old informant, associated her low level of education to war or security factor as follows

*“Wardah claims that her family forbade her from attending school because they were concerned about her safety during the war. She stated that the nearest school accessible at the time was 3 miles distant from her house and that she had no other means of transportation except to walk there. The path was also rather hazardous due to the unkempt bushes. Thus, it was extremely risky for a young girl like her to stroll there for fear of being harassed by bandits, the Japanese, or being attacked by wild animals like snakes. She did not acquire complete schooling although she claimed to know how to read Romanised and Jawi (a Malay writing system that uses the Arabic alphabet) words, as well as recite the Qur'an, which she learned afterwards from her children”.*

The foregoing narrative clearly demonstrates that the informant's lack of formal education was caused by insecurity during the war. The circumstance was common because

Malaya was still underdeveloped at the time. The majority of the roads were not paved yet, and public facilities like educational institutions and transportation were scarce in rural regions. Furthermore, crime was rampant, particularly during the Japanese occupation. The informant went on to say that her family was afraid of the Japanese officials, who were known for abusing the natives. Wardah also said she heard a rumour that local women were frequently sexually harassed by those officials. As a result, after assessing the hazards, her family prioritized her safety over her education.

### **Poverty**

In the past, poverty was seen as one of the biggest barriers to first generation informants receiving a quality education. As a result, the majority of them were only able to complete primary education. This aspect is aggravated by their families' (parents') low socio-economic status and a lack of understanding about the necessity of education for their children. Furthermore, the vast majority of them came from rural regions in Kedah and Perak throughout the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. They came from impoverished homes and worked a variety of odd jobs to make ends meet. Most of the informants were rubber tappers at rubber estates, farmers at paddy fields, or coconut collectors in coastal areas before migrating to FELDA.

One of the informants, Nuh (pseudonym), aged 68 years old and has been gone through such a circumstance, narrated the following

*“He associated his low educational level with poverty, and he said that he had to forgo his desire of excelling in education in order to support his family by working in the rice field and doing odd jobs to make ends meet. However, he did attend a madrasah (a school system that practises formal and systematic learning and uses a syllabus from the Middle Eastern learning institutions) for religious studies. Unfortunately, due to poverty, he was unable to complete it.”*

The majority of the first-generation informants' families who worked in the agricultural sector had tough times and struggled to make ends meet. They had difficulty covering their kitchen expenses for their large-sized families at times. Some even said that their parents had to loan some money to buy groceries because of their bad financial situation. Because of poverty, the informants had little choice but to stop attending to school after receiving a basic education and spend more time working to improve their financial circumstances.

The parents of the first-generation informants did not invest in their children's education due to poverty, as evidenced by the preceding example. The money they earned was barely enough to cover their basic needs, such as food, clothes, and shelter. As a result, they chose to drop out of school and engage in economic activities in order to contribute to their family's income. This is consistent with findings observed by (Adam et al., 2016; Mansur et al., 2009; and Mawere, 2012). According to Adam et al (2016), children's education is often seen as a matter that must be sacrificed in favour of more important things such as food. Thus, the children had little choice but to drop out of school and join the labour in order to support their family.

### **Religious Beliefs**

Religious belief was an essential aspect that affected how and why the first-generation informants' parents made a decision about their education. First-generation female



informants stated that the majority of them did not have the chance to continue their education beyond secondary school. This was due to their parents' strong views on how females should act and dress in accordance with Islamic beliefs. Their parents constantly emphasised the need of dressing modestly, especially while they were outside. Hence, the females were not allowed to go to secondary schools, notably missionary secondary schools, since the dress code (wearing a pinafore) was thought to be in conflict with Islamic principles. An informant, Baizura (pseudonym), 65, narrated as follows

*“She stated how harsh her father was in deciding not to allow her to continue her education at a missionary secondary school. She described her father as a devout practising Muslim who wanted his children to always conduct in line with Islamic principles. He opposed to allowing her to attend such a school, worried that she would not dress correctly. Hence, she received just up until primary school education.”*

It is apparent that religion has an important part in shaping one's decision. In this example, the parents of female informants placed religion a vital factor in their lives, resulting in their low academic accomplishment.

### **Cultural Traditions**

In relation to cultural traditions, informants have noticed its numerous dimensions. They indicated that cultural customs had a substantial impact on their education, particularly when it came to pursuing higher education. The dimensions of such cultural traditions were gender-role orientation, parental roles, and early marriage. In terms of gender-role orientation, the respondents said that men and women were assigned to separate activities. Karina (pseudonym), a 59-year-old informant, indicated that her poor academic accomplishment was due to her parents' cultural expectations, including the requirement for females to take care of household chores. She narrated as follows

*“After only one day of learning in standard one, she had to quit attending to school. She and her other female siblings were required to assist her mother with housework as children, especially after her mother had given birth to a new baby at the time. With 14 siblings to look after, she and her sisters were expected to keep the house in order. As a result, she admitted that she never learned to read, write, or count until she was taught by her grown-up children.”*

The preceding scenario demonstrated how cultural customs influenced the informants' educational levels in the past. There was a strict gender-role orientation that indirectly prevented them from acquiring formal education at schools, and females were often disadvantaged in this regard as compared to males. The female informants were taught household responsibilities as early as five to six years old, including babysitting younger siblings, cooking, sewing, and cleaning. On the other hand, their male counterparts were expected to be future breadwinners for their families. They were trained to undertake occupations that needed more physical strength and were tied to their families' economic interests, such as building and mending houses, cutting firewood, and assisting their fathers in the agricultural and fishing activities. This gender role orientation was a form of socialization that all genders were required to engage in. The informants stated that carrying out such job

was considered as a more important obligation above other matters such as the necessity for formal education. As a result, they refused to attend school and diligently followed any responsibilities assigned to them, fearing that if they did not, they would be labelled as *tidak taat* (disobedient) by their parents. Juma and Simatwa (2014); Lyndon et al (2012); Njie et al (2015) found a similar pattern of findings in their investigations.

Apart from gender role orientation, the parents of the first-generation informants believed that formal education was not the most important thing they could provide their children. As a result, they believe that education is meaningless to their children's future. One of the informants, Yaaqub (pseudonym), a 69-year-old guy narrated the following

*“He said that he quit attending school after completing standard 6. He was eager to enrol in the next level of education namely Sekolah Lanjutan Kampung (Rural Trade School), to concentrate in carpentry since he had a deep interest in it. His request, however, was dismissed as trivial, and his parents did not take it seriously. He also stated that his father never attended a Parents-Teachers Association (PTA) meeting, demonstrating that he was unconcerned about his children's academic performance.”*

The aforementioned instances show that a lack of parents' awareness of the necessity of formal education, as well as their unfavourable perspective of the function of formal education, were seen as important causes for the low rate of school enrolment. They did not feel that education would have an impact on their children's future. They preferred that their children assist them in contributing to the household earnings by cooperating in the paddy field or fishing at sea. Furthermore, they were sceptical of the existing institutions established by colonizers since the contents taught in such schools were secular. They were concerned that their children might be impacted by the colonizers' alien culture and religion, which were far different from their own. It is worth noting that their cultural tradition was intertwined with their religious tradition. They believed that teaching their children Islamic knowledge was essential since religion was the most significant aspect of their lives. As a result, learning about Islam was given precedence over secular education. They preferred sending their sons to local religious teachers for Qur'anic education, while daughters were taught the Qur'an by their mothers, aunts, or elder siblings.

The situation was much worse for the girls, whose parents thought that no formal education was required for them. This is because domestic labour did not require any schooling and they were already skilled in such jobs because they had been trained since they were children. Furthermore, the parents believed that there was no need for females to have a high degree of education because they would end up doing housework anyway, and career women were uncommon in the past. As a result, they did not need to be educated because they would never work in a field that requires such qualifications. They were primarily housewives, with some joining the economic sector just to assist their husbands in the rice fields or plantations, obviating the need for formal education in schools. This also suggests that gender discrimination was pervasive at that time in terms of educational attainment.

Aside from gender role orientation and parents' lack of understanding about education, early marriage was also one of the reasons impeding Malays, particularly girls, from achieving high academic results. Hana (pseudonym), a 66-year-old informant, described her experience as follows:

*“She finished grade six and was offered the option to continue her education in a madrasah to learn more about Islamic subjects. For several years, she studied the Qur'an and other Islamic courses. She was unable to finish her education after her parents married her off to her husband, who was six years older than her. She admitted as being immature at the time. She was taken aback when she went home one day to find a group of strangers at her house asking for her hand in marriage. She was 16 years old at the time.”*

Many of the first-generation female informants revealed that early marriage was a common practise in the past due to cultural traditions that caused it to occur. They stated that their parents expected them to obey their decision to marry once they reached marriageable age, which may occur as early as 14 years old i.e., after puberty. The majority of the time, the marriage was planned by the families. Informants also stated that their parents thought the perfect possible partner should be substantially older than their daughters. This highlighted the necessity of having men who were financially stable and mature enough to be trustworthy husbands for the wives. In this regard, it is worth noting that all of the first-generation female informants were married to men who were older than them. It is also interesting to note that the majority of them had a five to seven-year age gap between their spouses. Another explanation for the common practise of early marriage was that parents did not want their daughters to become spinsters or marry at an older age. This is because they felt it was preferable to marry and have children at a young age since they were healthy and fit to go through the process of conceiving, delivering, and childbearing at that age. Karina (pseudonym), who is 59 years old, reflects this as follows

*“Her parents had urged her to marry early for health reasons, she explained. They stated that it was preferable for her to marry and reproduce at a young age since women who married at an older age were more likely to encounter health issues such as problems becoming pregnant and the potential of miscarriage. When she was 14, she was married off to her husband, who was seven years older than her. She had her first child when she was 15 years old and stopped conceiving when she was 31 years old, after having seven children. She confessed that she wished she had done childbirth when she was younger since she was full of energy at the time.”*

Thus, it is comprehensible that women were less educated as a result of the aforementioned reason since their major role after marriage was primarily inside the domestic sphere, which prevented them from completing their education. Bayisenge (2010) discovered similar results, as did (Sekine and Hodgkin, 2017). For instance, according to Sekine and Hodgkin (2017), females had poorer education than males due to the practice of early marriage, which they felt was a protective strategy that may safeguard their family honour. They expected older and more mature men to protect their wives from crimes like rape and abduction. As a result, because married women were responsible for household responsibilities, it hindered their opportunity to gain a high academic qualification.

The preceding discussions have gone into great detail about the first generation's low academic accomplishment as a result of issues like war, poverty, religious beliefs, and cultural traditions. Despite the fact that the majority of first-generation informants had received basic education, a minority of them went on to complete secondary school (16%). These secondary

education achievers attended religious schools which can be divided into two types, i.e., apprentice and *madrasah* styles.

The apprentice style describes a manner in which students would personally gain religious knowledge from prominent scholars known as *ulama'*. It does not require students to take any exams to test their knowledge. They are free to learn any Islamic subject from the *ulama'* depending on their interests, and the class schedule is flexible, free, and there is no age restriction. However, some of them follow this form of religious learning style because they have a strong interest in Islamic knowledge and want to prepare for the *tauliah* certificate. This certificate allows them to publicly teach and preach Islamic lessons, which is required in several states in Malaysia. An informant called Idris (pseudonym), 71, describes his experience as follows

*“He spent several years studying Islamic subjects from a notable tok guru (highly qualified religious instructor) in his hometown to achieve tauliah. He revealed that he had a strong desire to acquire Islamic studies, which drove him to obtain tauliah at such a young age. He was 25 years old at the time and had not yet married. He had gone to the tok guru's residence every weekend for two years to study from him for the said purpose. He kept learning from another ustaz in his hometown after passing the tauliah test to learn about additional Islamic knowledge, and this lasted until his early years of marriage.”*

On the other hand, *madrasah* style refers to structured and systematic learning that employs curriculum from Middle Eastern educational institutions. Students are required to excel in a major test called *empat Thanawi*, which is equal to *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (Malaysian Certificate of Education), at the completion of their education. This *empat Thanawi* certificate certifies their knowledge of Islam and allows them to teach others. An informant named Adam (pseudonym), 66, described how he spent most of his childhood learning Islamic courses at the *madrasah* as follows

*“He attributed his accomplishment in obtaining the certificate to years of studying Islamic disciplines at various madrasahs in Perak. He finished his studies when he was 22 years old, after passing the empat Thanawi examination. He was grateful that his hard work and commitment had allowed him to grasp the material and earn the certificate. He is now an ustaz (religious teacher) who actively teaches Qur'anic and tarannum (knowledge regarding the style of Qur'anic recitation and chanting with different styles of intonations and rhythms) courses.”*

The previous instances show that informants saw Islamic studies as more important than secular education. For a variety of reasons, most of them favoured religious education during their time. The education they received was affordable, without any age limit, and was based on Islamic curriculum. Many of their parents wanted them to be educated in such a manner since it is always emphasised in the Malay tradition that every child receives Islamic education. These were the educational patterns that existed in the 1950s and 1960s.

It is also worth noting that, despite some socio-cultural factors that made it difficult for these first-generation informants to obtain a high level of education, the existence of some awareness of the importance of education among both the informants and their parents enabled them to complete secondary school. The tendency, however, was toward pro-Islamic

studies. This demonstrates the parents' strong religious conviction that they wanted their children to be Islamic-oriented rather than secular-educated. This is due to the fact that they believed religious education would secure a better life in both this world and the next.

None of the first-generation informants completed tertiary or postgraduate education. They stated that obtaining such a high level of education, tertiary and even postgraduate, was unimaginable for them. The social circumstances at the time were not suitable to encouraging them to attain such a degree of knowledge. This is reflected in the narrative of Ayyub (pseudonym), who is 69 years old. He recounted his experience as follows

*“Despite his family's poverty at the time, he felt himself fortunate to have received a secondary education and an empat Thanawi certificate. He considered his accomplishment to be commendable in comparison to his fellow villagers, the majority of whom had only acquired primary school education. Furthermore, he had never seen or heard of any of his acquaintances who had been accepted into colleges at the time, and it was unusual for villagers to achieve such a level. As a result, seeing himself in higher education was unimaginable for him.”*

The preceding example implies that socio-economic conditions and peer roles were important factors that discouraged them from pursuing tertiary and postgraduate education. Firstly, their low socio-economic status prevented them from receiving a high degree of education beyond primary school. As a result, many of them were forced to discontinue their studies at a young age since their families could not afford to continue funding their education. It is understandable that they believed it was a satisfactory success if they could continue beyond that, i.e., complete secondary school. Second, the influence of peers was also vital in making this happen. Because the majority of their peers were uneducated, and they had no experience or exposure to people in higher learning institutions, it was understandable that they thought it was unthinkable to seek such great academic achievements. In other words, the lack of role models discouraged them to pursue further education.

### **Findings Based on Second Generation**

In terms of education, Table 1 clearly showed that there is a substantial discrepancy in educational accomplishment between the first and second generations. The said table demonstrates that 4 (2%) of the second generation had no schooling, none (0%) received education until primary level, 152 (64%) had a secondary level of education, 77 (32%) had a tertiary level of education, and 4 (2%) excelled at the postgraduate level of education. According to the figures in the table, there is an upward intergenerational social mobility pattern in terms of education.

In relation to the second generation who received no schooling, the primary reasons for it were unavoidable factors such as sickness and accessibility issue. Ziyad (pseudonym), 38, and Izara (pseudonym), 54, described their experience as follows

*“Ziyad had a constant fever, which his family characterised as a strange illness because it did not go away until he was in his adolescent. It was perplexing since when he was diagnosed by the doctors, it was classified as a normal fever. But it was a peculiar case because once he healed, it did not take long for it to reoccur. However, when his family consulted the bomoh (witchdoctor), he was seen as someone who lacked inner soul (lemah semangat). He was given traditional*



*medicines from time to time, but his illness never completely recovered. Thus, he had little choice except to skip school, and he eventually quit going due to his health condition. As a result, he was unable to read, write, or learn at all."*

*"Izara narrated that prior to migrating to FELDA Trolak Utara, they resided at the coastal area. She and her two siblings used to commute to school by sampan since that was the only way to cross the water and get to the school on the other side of the island at the time. On their way to school, they were exposed to intense blazing sunlight and the heat of the sea. Her siblings were unable to bear it and frequently became ill. Because of their recurrent fevers, they missed school on a regular basis and eventually stopped going altogether."*

Aside from the 4 (2%) of children who did not attend school, there was none (0%) who only had until primary education. Further, a substantial majority of children, 152 (64%), attained secondary education. A sizable proportion or 77 (32%) of them obtained higher education, and even 4 (2%) of the children were able to continue their study at the postgraduate level.

### **Family Institutions**

Family factors are the most powerful determining reasons that lead to high levels of academic accomplishment among children. The study found that family factors had a major influence in improving children's educational levels because family provides unconditional support in two fundamental dimensions: financial support and educational supervision. Because education was a priority for the second generation's social mobility, financial support for their education was always accentuated besides kitchen expenditures. Despite the fact that the settlers' socio-economic situation was severely disadvantaged, they worked hard to generate additional money to spend in their children's education. An informant called Rayyan (pseudonym), 46 years old, recounted his experience as follows

*"As a child of a single mother, he attributed his high level of education to his mother's efforts in undertaking various types of extra work such as working in rubber farms at nearby FELDA settlements. Her mother also ran several minor enterprises, such as selling kuih (Malay delicacies that are often eaten as snacks or desserts which are normally in bite-sized shapes) and managing their family's grocery store, especially when his father died at a young age."*

Another informant, Danial (pseudonym), 35, linked his high level of education to the support he received from his family, particularly his older brothers, who sacrificed themselves for their siblings' education, as he described below

*"He stated that his older brothers were always willing to assist him if he had any financial difficulties while studying. He recounted being quite affected when they purchased him a desktop computer for RM4,000 in 2002 after he told them about the difficulty of getting from the dormitory to the cybercafé. Because they were pricey at the time, few students could afford one. He stated that having one was critical since he required it to complete written academic exercises during the last semester of his bachelor's degree."*



Aside from financial support, family support in the form of educational supervision was also prevalent among the settlers. To secure their children's academic advancement, the first-generation settlers strongly urged them to study. They were extremely helpful in monitoring their children's schoolwork when they were available. As Nuh (pseudonym), who is 67 years old, narrated as follows

*“He stated that he accompanied his children every night to supervise them doing their school work. He would switch off the television or any other distraction that could be interfering with the children's concentration. He did not mind sitting next to them and watching them work for hours because he wanted them to achieve a better life by doing well in their studies.”*

Apart from the encouragement offered to prompt the children in their studies, there was also another type of supervision known as punishment, which was effectuated if they did anything that upset the parents. Danial (pseudonym), a 35-year-old informant narrated as below

*“He characterized his father as being very stern when it came to his children's academics. He was once reprimanded for skipping a primary school class. His father would tie him to a tree for several hours until red ants covered his body, and in another occasion, he was locked out of the house. They were unforgettable memories that made him vow never to make the same mistake again.”*

The preceding instances clearly indicated that family had a significant effect in shaping children's academic performance. Most of the informants' narratives emphasized the family's seriousness and commitment to ensure the children's educational achievement, particularly those including their sacrifice in terms of financial assistance, strict supervision, and punishment. The majority of family members stated that they would do whatever they could to encourage and support the children's achievement. This showed that first generation informants were extremely aware of the value of education, since the majority of them thought it might make a difference in their children's future if they assisted them in obtaining it. Previous studies such as observed by Chen (2017); Hedges et al (2016); Zedan (2012), have clearly demonstrated the significance of education. Parents, according to Chen (2017); Hedges et al (2016), believed that education was an important impetus for upward intergenerational social mobility. Regardless of their socio-economic status, they were willing to financially support their children's education and even extend it to higher education, i.e., tertiary education, so that their children would have a better future than they did.

### **Roles of Government**

Another important factor that contributed to the second generation's success in obtaining high academic qualification was the assistance provided by the government and organizations. The government's and FELDA's financial assistance were an influential factor in assisting the second generation to achieve higher social mobility in education. As a responsible semi-government body, FELDA's human capital quality is always its top priority. It was founded with the intention of improving the nation's socio-economic conditions, particularly those of the Bumiputeras (the Malays, the aborigines of Peninsular Malaysia and the indigenous people of East Malaysia) in the post-independence era. The goal, as stated in its objectives,

remains the same i.e., to develop quality human capital capable of generating high income and becoming a model rural community. Both the government in general and FELDA in particular invest a substantial portion of their educational budgets toward this goal. This type of assistance does not only alleviate the financial burden that settlers bear for their children's educational expenses, but it also aims to encourage their academic excellence. This is consistent with what madam Aireen (pseudonym), the education officer in wilayah Trolak, has stated

*“She recounted that FELDA wants to ensure that all of its younger generation excels academically or passes all important examinations such as Primary School Assessment Test, Form Three Assessment, and Malaysian Certificate of Education. She went on to say that FELDA believes education is the most important factor in determining one's future, and that as a result, her bureau bears a massive responsibility for ensuring academic progress.”*

Informants at the tertiary level of education reported that some of them received FELDA incentive money when they were offered admission to higher learning institutions. Amelia (pseudonym), a 30-year-old informant, narrated as follows

*“She received a RM1,000 incentive from the FELDA office after obtaining an offer letter to continue her studies in a bachelor's degree at the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). She was grateful for it because she desperately needed it for university registration purposes.”*

The incentive is a form of reward and motivational encouragement for FELDA generations who are successful in pursuing tertiary education. It was originally intended for the second generation, but it has now been extended to the third generation as well. Those pursuing a diploma would receive RM500, those pursuing a bachelor's degree at local universities would receive RM1,000, and those pursuing degree abroad would receive RM1,500. This incentive, however, was only given once to each FELDA generation individual. For example, if a young FELDA person received the aforementioned incentive during his/her diploma, he/she would not receive it again if accepted into a bachelor degree programme.

Another effort made by FELDA was to ensure the convenience of its generation who was studying in higher learning institutions by having its own schemes that allowed them to get a 30% discount off the total amount of loan they needed to pay after they graduated. However, they had to apply for a loan from the National Higher Education Fund or *Perbadanan Tabung Pendidikan Tinggi Nasional* (PTPTN) first. When they were offered the loan, they had to attach the document and submit it to the FELDA office in their respective settlements, which would then be forwarded to the head office. To be eligible for the said discount, the office would either approve or deny the application after reviewing the students' documents as well as their results after they finished their studies. Aside from the aforementioned discount, FELDA also had its own fund and educational loans for those pursuing their studies, particularly bachelor degree programmes. This was reflected in the narratives of a 21-year-old informant Farah (pseudonym), as follows

*“She expressed her gratitude to FELDA for providing a large amount of financial assistance for educational purposes. She had applied for a FELDA loan with a 30%*

*discount from her PTPTN loan during her diploma, and at the time of the interview, she was applying for a FELDA loan for her next bachelor's degree. She was very motivated to do well in her studies because it also offered an initiative for excellent students (they did not have to pay the loan back and it could be considered a scholarship)."*

Youngsters who wanted to continue their studies in the skills programmes were strongly advised to enrol at the FELDA college called Kolej Yayasan FELDA (KYF). This college provided certificate and diploma programmes in areas such as automotive, oil and gas, computer systems, information technology, health management, hairdressing, tailoring, English intensive courses, and hotel and food services. The FELDA generation (including the children of FELDA employees) was given priority to fill the 80% quota for each year's intake, with the remaining 20% open to the public. Its certificate was accepted not only by Malaysia's Ministry of Human Resources, but also by City and Guilds in the United Kingdom. This indicated that the modules used by the institution were distinct from those used by other colleges and it would assist students in becoming more skilled in their respective programmes. FELDA covered all of the students' expenses, including academic and food fees. Ruhainis (pseudonym), the college manager, narrated that

*"She repeatedly stated how fortunate the FELDA generation was to be given the opportunity to further their studies at KYF. This is because all students were fully sponsored by FELDA, and it was estimated that each student would cost RM5,000 per session (six months) to continue their studies at this institution. Students only had to pay a registration fee of RM100 to RM250 to obtain a certificate recognized by the Department of Skills Development, Ministry of Human Resources Malaysia. In addition, all other fees, such as meals and hostel, were covered."*

On the other hand, children who remarkably achieved the highest academic qualification i.e., postgraduate studies responded that scholarship funded by the Malaysian government is vital in assisting them to achieve their goals. An informant called Myra (pseudonym), 31 years old described her experience as follows

*"She expressed her utmost gratitude to the government, particularly the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE), for the financial assistance provided by the MyPhD scholarship under the MyBrain15 scheme. It was adequate for her because it did not only cover her tuition fees but also provided a monthly allowance of RM2,300. As a result, she and her family no longer had to be concerned about money, and she could concentrate on completing her PhD at Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM)."*

### **Positive Attitudes**

Another factor that enabled these informants to further their studies at a higher level i.e., postgraduate studies was their deep interest in the subject matter itself. They stated that by pursuing postgraduate studies, they were able to learn a specific discipline in greater depth, allowing them to gain a better understanding. This was relevant because some of them wanted to get jobs or had already started working in jobs related to the said discipline. This is evident in the case of Amelia (pseudonym), a 29-year-old informant

*“She explained the reason why she wanted to pursue a postgraduate degree in counselling was due to her deep interest. She was a full-time school teacher who was also a part-time student at a local Malaysian university. She did a bachelor's degree in psychology and learned a little bit about counselling. She became interested in the discipline and wanted to learn more about it since then. She also told me about her plans to pursue a Malaysian counselling certification in order to change careers and become a professional counsellor. It was for the sake of her satisfaction in doing a job she enjoyed. Teaching in schools was extremely stressful for her, and she preferred counselling practise to it.”*

It is clear from the preceding examples that the financial assistance provided by the government and organization, as well as deep interest in learning about a discipline, were important factors in manifesting their dreams of pursuing postgraduate education. This is parallel with the findings observed by Idris (2004) and Ali et al. (2010). It is also notable that socio-economic conditions or poverty are no longer a stumbling block for children to achieve the highest level of education at postgraduate levels, thanks to the government's excellent role in investing in their young generation's education, which could be a valuable asset for the country (Bakar, 2013; Ismail, 2011; Khan, 2014; Ministry of Finance Malaysia, 2022; Sarifudin, 2010).

From the previous discussion of social mobility due to education, it is clear that the two generations of FELDA settlers experienced impressive upward social mobility in terms of education. Even though there were some incidents that showed a horizontal intergenerational social mobility pattern, particularly represented by the second generation who had no schooling, it however was small in number. The findings regarding upward and horizontal intergenerational social mobility were consistent with Sorokin's (1959) theory on intergenerational social mobility. He believed that intergenerational social mobility entailed transformation, either upward or downward movement of individuals' social strata. Individuals can experience three types of intergenerational social mobility, namely upward, horizontal, and downward intergenerational social mobility. The findings of the study, as in the case of FELDA Trolak Utara, revealed that the first and second types of intergenerational social mobility described by Sorokin were clearly observed. It is also important to emphasize the obvious relationship between levels of education and individuals' destination, or how the former can influence the latter's future. Horizontal and upward intergenerational social mobility was discovered to be evident in this case. It also demonstrated the applicability of OED theory in explaining the significance of education in connecting people's origins and destinations (Goldthorpe, 2007). Most studies have found that education plays a significant role in determining one's intergenerational social mobility (Gao & Smyth, 2015; Harun et al., 2017; Morikawa, 2015; Mphuka & Simumba, 2012).

Due to their low educational attainment, it is obvious that the first generation's social mobility could not be improved. Furthermore, other vexing factors prevalent at the time, such as poverty and war, hampered their ability to obtain an education. They were also caught up in situations in which their parents' mindsets were primarily dictated by certain Malay cultural traditions and religious beliefs, such as gender role orientation, early marriage, and a preference for religious education over secular or formal education, which resulted in their low academic achievements, particularly among the women informants. The findings of this study revealed that men were given preference for educational opportunities over women, resulting in a gender disparity situation in relation to social mobility by education. This

unfortunate situation however inadvertently raised their awareness of the importance of education for future generations. This was evident in the fact that 98% of the second generation had formal education, with 34% able to advance to higher levels of education.

In addition, this study's findings indicated that education needed to be strengthened further by several other factors such as the roles of government, family institutions, and individual attitudes. The government, for example, played a significant role in producing a better educated generation by investing in and establishing adequate and modern educational infrastructure, scholarships, and financial assistance. The family institution, on the other hand, emphasised the importance of education by providing educational supervision as well as financial and moral support to the younger generation in order for them to excel in their studies. Furthermore, individuals' attitudes, as manifested by their determination and deep interest in individuals, i.e., the second generation, on the need to be highly educated, were identified as another impetus for the upward social mobility pattern between the two generations.

### **Conclusion**

As a whole, it can be concluded that the issues of intergenerational social mobility related to education discussed in this study largely contributes to an enticing perspective to the sociological body of knowledge, particularly in the areas of sociology of family, social change and development, and family issues. In addition, it also offers imperative implications for policymakers regarding the said issue within the FELDA Malay agricultural community. Important issues such as the development of educational infrastructures within the FELDA settlement should shed some light on how to improve the production of quality human capital through the process of intergenerational social mobility.

It further serves as a guideline for several social agents, such as families and educational institutions, to better understand how their roles are important in the context of intergenerational social mobility. The importance of socialization taught by social agents should be brought to the attention of such institutions in order to accelerate the rate of intergenerational social mobility in Malaysia to produce a distinguished human capital. Due to the limitation offered by this study, a number of future research avenues such as comparative studies among different ethnic groups and areas of residence and large-scale quantitative studies are also possible.

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