

THE INSTITUTIONAL EXPERIENCE AND LESSONS LEARNED BY YOUNG OFFENDERS IN A MALAYSIAN PRISON

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ABSTRACT

The article attempts to reveal findings regarding how young offenders from a prison in Malaysia shared their thoughts and insights pertaining their institutionalization experience. A qualitative approach was conducted through face-to-face interviews with three young offenders in Malaysia, basically requiring respondents to tell in detail what experiences and/or lessons learned since their first day of institutionalization. Findings discovered that, among other things; the institutional experience had given respondents a 'valuable' change in themselves in many ways - especially in attitude and self-management; first, they were become more positive towards getting good education as if they were outside; secondly, they were become more aware of the many hidden talents that yet to be developed; thirdly, they were determined to be more careful in socializing with friends and establishing new relationships; and lastly, they seemed to appreciate the love and affection of parents and family members than ever before. The most prominent lesson learned from these offenders was that they became more knowledgeable about legal education and personal rights especially about the criminal consequences they had committed as well as the impact of the sentence they had to bear during the institutional period. Finally, the article concludes that even though they had been dragged into the criminal justice system for quite some time, it was learned that young offenders in Malaysia can still gain useful experiences that may have taught them to correct their personal thoughts and mindsets towards managing themselves and to plan on their own future after being released from the institution as ordinary citizens outside.

Key words: young offenders/prisoners; institutionalization; rehabilitation; prison; Malaysia

INTRODUCTION

The Malaysia Prisons Department is the last institution in the national criminal justice system that responsible to secure a safe custody of prisoners who receive punishment. Many initiatives have been undertaken by the Malaysia Prisons Department to lead prisoners to return to society through the implementation of various systematic and organized rehabilitation programmes - which are closely linked to our current discussion involving young offenders - among others; through the "Putra Module".

The "Putra Module" is a specific rehabilitation programme that designs to develop young people who are being detained in the Henry Gurney Schools and the prison institutions in Malaysia. In the Prison Act 1995, it is defined that "young prisoners" refer to prisoners who are below twenty-one years of age.

The underlying principles beneath the Putra Module emphasize the holistic rehabilitation programme that stresses on the physical, clinical and psychological aspects of the young people. In general, the Putra Module acts as a guideline¹ for the prison institutions to provide rehabilitation programmes that will help the young people to realize their past criminal wrongdoings and to encourage them to be better persons before reintegration into the society upon release².

This Putra Module is observed as one of the rehabilitation models that are developed by the Rehabilitation and Treatment Unit of the Malaysia Prisons Department based on the "Human Development Plan" ("HDP"³) or the *Pelan Pembangunan Insan* ("PPI"⁴). Since its launch in 2004, the HDP operates as the blue print of the Malaysia Prisons Department in developing the rehabilitation programmes, modules and activities for the pre-sentence offenders, during sentence offenders and after sentence offenders.

The implementation of the Putra Module that adopts the 'school programme approach' underpins the academic educational approach allowing young offenders to continue and/or repeating their half way schooling activities resulting from their admission to the institutions⁵.

¹ Basically, the module consists 4 phases, namely "Disciplinary Building Programmes" (Phase 1), "Moral/Attitudes Reinforcement Programmes" (Phase 2), "Skills Programmes" (Phase 3) and "Humanity Programmes" (Phase 4)

² Refer details in MT Rosfizah (2011); Educating and Rehabilitating the Child and Young Offenders in the Prisons: A Practice in Malaysia; ICYouth 2011; 1-3 November 2011

³ Malaysia Prisons Department, (undated), "*Pelan Pembangunan Insan*", Malaysia Prisons Department, Selangor, Malaysia: (www.prison.gov.my)

⁴ Under the "*Pelan Pembangunan Insan*" of "*Human Development Plan*", all the rehabilitation programmes are designed based on the principles of "Knowledge, Attitudes, Skills, Intelligence and Humanity" (KASIH) which "KASIH" is also has been declared to be the motto of the division. For further details, refer website of the Malaysia Prisons Department (www.prison.gov.my).

⁵ "Sistem Pemulihan Penghuni Jabatan Penjara Malaysia – *Pelan Pembangunan Insan* (Human Spiritual Development Plan)", page 10, Bahagian Pemulihan dan Rawatan. Refer website of the Malaysia Prisons Department (www.prison.gov.my).

Under this module too, it is noted the young people are equipped with various programmes including academic, vocational, spiritual⁶, sports and co-curriculum activities. The academic programmes provided for the young people are basically focusing on the academic-oriented similar to the education system that is applied in the mainstream schools.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To date, studies related to young offenders in Malaysia focusing on their institutional experience are still lacking. Existing studies pertaining young offenders in Malaysia keen to discuss about the urgency of proper provisions of rehabilitation programmes for them during imprisonment.

It has been revealed that the rehabilitation programmes in the Malaysian prisons are perceived flaws and outdated. For instance, a remarkable note has been addressed that new rehabilitation programmes need to be implemented to help female prisoners reintegrate into the society (Yik Koon Teh; 2008).

In 2008, one rehabilitation programme involving young offenders in Malaysia through the school system was introduced by the establishment of an Integrity School which was initially started in Kajang Prison (MT Rosfizah; 2011; 2013; 2014). The objective of the provision of education is to improve and reinforce, help eliminate illiteracy issues among young offenders through reading, computing and writing in national language, providing and giving opportunities to start and continue schooling, raising interest to learn and convince students that learning can guarantee a better future (Prisons Department of Malaysia, 2009). Several challenges exposed by the Management Offender Unit of the Malaysia Prisons Department related to educational provisions for young offenders are among others; namely, the function of the Integrity School as a “normal” school cannot be implemented due to the lack of complete infrastructure; the limitation of learning materials provided in prisons particularly in the library; the learning and teaching process is often disturbed due to the frequent issue of enrolment registration and termination of students every month; and, the difficulty of controlling emotions and feelings of young offenders pursuing education in prisons resulting from their various personal and private problems (Darussalam; 2014).

In spite of those challenges, reports from the local newspapers have remarked some success stories of young offenders pursuing academic education whilst imprisoned within the Malaysian prisons institutions particularly in a few Integrity Schools and in Malacca Henry Gurney School, for instance; in 2017, 13 students obtained 4A to 9A in 2017 Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (<http://www.prison.gov.my>; 5 April 2018); three students from 157 candidates got 7A and at least 68 people got 1A in 2016 Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (the Malaysiantimes.com; 7 April 2017; Harian Metro; 8 April 2017; Utusan Malaysia; 21 March 2017) and one student of Sungai Petani Integrity School got 7A and 1B in SPM 2010 (Malaysiakini; 19 January 2012).

Another qualitative study provides an overview of the information needs of Malaysian male young offenders which discovered that juvenile delinquents are more likely to relate to their academic needs and general interests and just to fill their time while in prison. Participants in the study who are pursuing their diploma/degree programmes were not using the library, because the collection does not meet their academic needs. The opportunity to pursue knowledge from primary to secondary school and higher education helps juvenile delinquents to think critically and logically about their future (E.R.K. Rafedzi & A. Abrizah; 2016).

One study conducted among six young offenders between the ages of 13 and 17 years from Sekolah Tunas Bakti Sungai Besi, Kuala Lumpur found that difficult family conditions, school failure and association with deviant peers due to the poverty of their families were strongly related to the development of delinquent behaviours (Tai Soo Shong, Siti Hajar Abu Bakar, M Rezaul Islam; 2018).

Therefore, based on these previous studies, in this article, the researcher intends to explore the extent to which young offenders from a Malaysian prison reveal their own experience of institutionalization - whether they prefer to link their experiences with various educational-based inputs or there are other elements that are considered beneficial as useful guides in their lives after the prisons.

Henceforth, the article provides a discussion that would explain how the institutionalization experience reflects the attitude and behaviour of young offenders in a Malaysian prison while undergoing a variety of rehabilitation programmes during imprisonment.

The data include interviews with three respondents involved in the Malaysian criminal justice system for various criminal offences committed while they were still at a young age (Table 1).

The following research questions have been addressed in the present article; namely:

- (i) How do the young offenders cope during the imprisonment process? and,
- (ii) What can young offenders learn from their institutional experience?

⁶ Based on the National Curriculum Education in Malaysia, “spiritual” subjects refer to Religious Knowledge subject (taught to Muslim students) and/or Moral subjects (taught to non Muslim students). The teachings of spiritual subjects to Malaysian children are to fulfill the intention as embedded in the National Educational Philosophy, “Education in Malaysia is on-going efforts towards further developing the potential of individuals in a holistic and integrated manner, so as to produce individuals who are intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and physically balanced and harmonic, based on a firm belief in and devotion to God. Such an effort is designed to produce Malaysian citizens who are knowledgeable and competent, who possess high moral standards and who are responsible and capable of achieving high level of personal well-being as well as being able to contribute to the harmony and betterment of the society and the nation at large”. Further details; refer the website of Ministry of Education, Malaysia at <http://www.moe.gov.my>

Therefore, the research objectives set in the current article are:

- (i) To examine the thoughts and views of young offenders on how they cope during the imprisonment process; and,
- (ii) To review the feelings and reflections of young offenders towards their institutional experience.

The purpose of this article is to discuss whether the attitude and behaviour of young offenders while coping with their imprisonment process would contribute some useful knowledge and/or good life experiences as they had involved with a criminal justice system at a young age?

METHODOLOGY

The current article attempts to share some findings from a recent study on young offenders and their institutional experience in a Malaysian prison.

From the beginning, once the researcher had received the permission to undertake the study at the Malaysia Prisons Department and had passed all the relevant procedures relating to doing research within closed institutions, therefore, the researcher undertook a face-to-face interview with three young offenders in the institution.

The sample selection was based on a random sampling where the researcher aimed of inquiring the opinions and views of three young offenders who are presently undergoing imprisonment in Malaysia related to their institutional experience. Hence, a small number of respondents is appropriate and acceptable to meet the research objectives as mentioned in the above, which are likely to be chosen by prison officers, prior to the respondents' willingness to be interviewed and their readiness to follow the prison rules regarding research rules and procedures during the field of study. Then, all the respondents were asked to sign an Informed Consent form indicating they were voluntarily agreed to be participants in the study.

Next, for the purpose of this article, all the three respondents are given pseudonyms in which their real names are only known to the researcher. Their pseudonyms are as follows: "Bob" (the first respondent); "David" (the second respondent) and "Azam" (the third respondent).

All the data analysis process was performed by the researcher manually. Eventually, the analysis was done according to the emerged themes towards answering the research questions pre set earlier.

During the interview, it was understood that all the respondents were in the prison between 1 - 3 years during their sentence. The researcher was also being notified too, that two of the respondents were sentenced for an offence under Section 302 of Penal Code (Death Punishment for Murder) whereas one of them was sentenced under Section 39B of Dangerous Drugs Act 1952 (Drug Trafficking) (Table 1).

The interviews conducted were based upon one semi-structured questions where a set of open-ended questions prepared in advance by the researcher as a guide that enabled the respondents to be more receptive and independently expressing their thoughts and views against the questions posed.

Table 1: Profile of Respondents

| Respondent (pseudonyms) | Offence | Age (when entered the prison) | Age (Present) | Term Served at the Time of Interview |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1 ("Bob") | 302 Penal Code | 15 years old | 18 years old | 3 years |
| 2 ("David") | 302 Penal Code | 19 years old | 20 years old | 1 year |
| 3 ("Azam") | Section 39B Dangerous Drugs Act 1952 | 18 years old | 20 years old | 2 years |

In this instance, the researcher intends to understand the behaviour and the insights of young offenders about their feelings towards the institutional experiences that may have been able to educate them with some good life experiences and/or useful knowledge during their sentence period to this far.

Finally, the findings of this study will be used to identify the extent to which young offenders think of programme(s)/module(s) that are considered suitable and appropriate for them to persevere through the whole rehabilitation process in the Malaysian prison.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

(a) Coping with Imprisonment Period Continuing Schooling Activities

The data revealed that as soon as after the young offenders had completed undergoing the basic prison rehabilitation modules as prisoners, they will usually focus on pursuing half-abandoned academic activities they left behind. Therefore, from the beginning, they seemed to be struggling to find useful information towards placing themselves to take the opportunity to continue studying at the institution.

David explained,

“... (When I was) in phase 1 for 6 months (basic prison rehabilitation modules), there was one senior I knew, I asked him to tell the Academic Supervisor that I wanted to study. My senior got 7A [in SPM (Malaysian Education Certificate)]! I asked him to recommend me to the Academic Supervisor... (Later), (after) my interview (process) and (finally), I was able to enter (the) academic (programme) (since) last year. (At first), I entered the pre-SPM (programme) ... (i.e.) form 4 (for) two months. After that, (during) the year-end examination (last year), I sat the exam and (successfully) made myself as an excellent student (amongst Form 4 students), and now I am sitting for the SPM...”

Azam added,

“...[W]hen I (first) entered here (prison) (in) 2016, I did not get the opportunity to continue studying because I must follow the phase (basic prison rehabilitation modules), stage by stage. Gradually, I (tried) to regain self courage and confidence. Next, (during) the following year 2017, I wanted to achieve one thing; I'm determined to change my (past) mistake! I wanted to take SPM (Malaysian Education Certificate)... ”

Meanwhile for Bob, when elaborated his previous personal experience after had been taken into police custody over his suspected involvement in a criminal offence a few years ago, among others exposed,

“..... I took (first time) PT3 (Form Three Assessment) at the police station. When the exam results came out, my mom took it at school, my mom said my Maths and Science (subjects) failed. (But) when the SPM (Malaysian Education Certificate results) came out here (I took the exam in prison), I looked at Maths and Science (subjects); I got C+, and Science; I got B. I did not believe this! (Actually) I did not expect much...”

From the above quotes, we can conclude that in principle, it is undeniable that the young offenders were compelled to accept the fact that they must comply with all prison rules since the beginning of their admission to the institution. Gradually, they acknowledged that they were still committed to continue schooling and this remains a priority even they were currently in custody.

We may also be aware that all the young offenders acknowledged that they wanted to pursue any academic and/or educational programmes they had ignored which had led them astrayed to committing a criminal act resulted them to be admitted into the institution.

Redeem Past Mistakes

Subsequently, when asked about their opinion of what influenced them most to resume schooling during the imprisonment, they spontaneously envisioned as if it was an immediate response that must be taken after these years they ignored the importance of education while in the mainstream school, for example David expressed his regret,

“Before, (during I was outside), I did not know the value of the SPM certificate (Malaysian Education Certificate)! When the teachers (here) told me (its value), only then I realized. The SPM (results) can also assist in my court hearing as well!”

Likely in Azam's case, he revealed,

“I (already) did things that were inappropriate (in the past)... the influence of friends! My SPM certificate (Malaysian Education Certificate) result (before) was not good either. I know I'm capable of (more than what I've achieved!). Outside (at that particular time), I took Science stream - 10 subjects. But I just (only managed) to get 3As (in) my SPM, (while) others (other subjects) were all bad (failed)!...”

Bob too, disclosed, when recalling his old bad days relating to schooling activities, he directly declared,

“... [B]efore (when I was) outside, (it's) not (that) I was not good at it (performed in school)... I was so lazy... (mingling with) friends (outside)... (But) when studying in prison, there's nothing (else) to think ... no gadgets, no girlfriends!”

Furthermore, Bob continued,

“...Stay here (in prison), school clothes, bags, shoes... we get (them) all ... all I need to do is (just) to learn (study). That's all! SPM (Malaysian Education Certificate) fees, everything (is being paid) ... being here, just keep studying! People say, (this is) a golden opportunity. If you do not take it, (you'll) lose it ... everything here (prison) is free!!

It was also observed, despite thinking that they had wasted almost the entire school years getting involved with wrongful conducts in the past, now, the young offenders have begun to realize that they must redeem past failures by putting more useful efforts to amend their former bad academic achievements.

Think More Positively

In addition, the findings illustrated that by equipping themselves with useful learning activities during the imprisonment, the young offenders hope to "transform" themselves into ordinary persons with a clearer goal of life. This indirectly will also help them seeing that academic outcome could contribute towards preserving them as people who are motivated and always wanting to get early release from prison.

It is apparent when Bob predicted,

“...I see my friend(s) ... get free earlier (early release from prison) because he has the SPM (Malaysian Education Certificate)!”

Henceforth, he continued his view,

“... Madam (the Academic Supervisor) said if I have a good SPM (Malaysian Education Certificate) result, (this) can help me (reduce my punishment etc.)... my resume is good ... my study is good.”

Also David supported Bob's thoughts by mentioning that,

"(I) have plans, if (I got) free (later), (I will) continue to study outside... (I can still) utilize the results (to pursue) studies (while) in prison (later)."

Azam reacted when speaking in a positive tone,

"...[S]ome of my friends who have SPM, like some of us (we), still (are) remanded (prisoners), (and) the others (of us) have been sentenced. So, (for) remanded (prisoners), they have many limitations... but for the sentenced prisoners, they will all (totally) rely on the prison (Authority), and if you (we) submit applications (to continue studies), the prison (Authority) will approve (your application), you will get (it)... (also) (previous) schools (still) keep our records... the SPM (and so on), they (the prison Authority) will support us entering the OUM (one of the learning higher institutions in Malaysia)...!"

Based on the above data, we are able to capture the goals of the young offenders who are constantly trying to highlight to the Prison Authorities that they have shifted to thinking and moving towards better direction while also being able to see the positive side of their own personal life.

(b) Institutional Experiences

From the interviews too, the researcher discovers that, among other things; the institutional experience has given all the respondents a 'valuable' change in themselves in many ways - especially in attitude and self-management which may be discussed in four major points as elaborated below:

Positive towards Getting Good Education

First, the data emerged that all the respondents indirectly agreed they became more positive towards getting good education as if they were outside.

According to the data, in his own words, Azam clearly mentioned that,

".... [e]ducation in here (prison) will help us. It helps me, it will help other people. It's for the future and the people around us. We don't know that education can benefit us unless we try... So if we prove to ourselves, then, the people outside will see our potential!"

And as pointed out by Bob,

"...[M]y new knowledge (here) ... is studying (academic). I took PT3 (first time) at the police station. When the exam results came out, my mom took it at school, my mom said my Maths and Science (subjects) failed. (But) when the SPM (Malaysian Education Certificate results) came out here (I took the exam in prison), I looked at Maths and Science (subjects); I got C+, and Science; I got B. I did not believe this! (Actually) I did not expect much..."

Meanwhile, David expressed,

"...[N]ow, I will sit for the SPM (Malaysian Education Certificate) exam. I took SPM again (here is) to upgrade my (past SPM results). I do not know what (else) to do in here, so, it's better for me to gain knowledge!"

From the above data, the researcher may imply that the respondents have a positive thought about gaining a good education even they are presently being imprisoned. Somehow, all respondents believe that at least they must have SPM certificates (Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia) as if they were still in mainstream schools outside the institution.

Furthermore, the data suggested that these young offenders highlight their desire to improving their education standards. This shows how young offenders began to correct their way of life towards a better and brighter future from day-to-day being institutionalized.

Discover Hidden Talents

Apart from that, the data confirmed, after being institutionalized, all the respondents appeared to become more aware of the many hidden talents that they possess, yet to be developed. They seemed to be grateful for the help of prison staff who highlight their positive talents and are encouraged to use them for good purposes.

When asked whether the respondents were aware of any new talent since the institutionalization, Bob told briefly,

".... [L]eadership.... leadership skills. Because it's not easy to control people! (I) was appointed as the Head (in the block) early this year..."

Similar response from Azam,

".... I do not think I have (any) specialty in anything (when first came into the institution).... When I get in here, (slowly) I just noticed that I can (also) lead (peers).... When I first came here, it made me realized (there are) some (positive) fields I can get engaged into but slowly... like leadership, I am getting to know (now) how hard it is to lead (others)..."

Beyond that, David shared his experience of being an efficient inmate who was often expected to help the supervisor teacher and staff in prison handling several clerical matters.

He explained in details,

"...I became a 'checker' (the task is to monitor the number of inmates in the prison block). I (always) help the (prison) staffs (doing this). I usually help my teacher (supervisor) with printing tasks... create the class control book... So when the (prison) staffs always see me doing that kind of work, so during school holidays, they told me to (assist) in the checking work with them."

According to the above responses, we can understand that the young offenders have learned how to identify their original talents and begin to appreciate them in a good way. Not only that, they were more likely to utilize their newly developed skills and knowledge for the benefit of others.

In this respect, the researcher believes through the constant exposure and attention given by the management and prison staffs, progressively, these young offenders can discipline themselves to become more self-confident and independent persons from day-to-day being in the prison.

The researcher also opines that the respondents clearly indicated they were keen to polish and develop their skills and knowledge so that they could contribute positively to others around them during the incarceration.

Selective in Choosing Peers

Next, the data revealed that the institutionalization experience has also made the young offenders determined to be more careful in socializing with friends and establishing new relationships.

For instance, Azam was very honest sharing one golden lesson he had learned about associating with fellow friends during incarceration. He elucidated,

"... [I] learned a lot when I came here. Persons who are with us will not always be with us! People who are remanded with me, some are gone (left the place). I noticed people will come and go but Allah alone will always be with me!"

Meanwhile, Bob exposed his former bad habits that had led him to be more cautious in selecting peers in the future,

"In the past, I never knew what drugs were?! When I was with them (wrong peers), I got to know what kind of drugs were like. I was wrong being with such persons. Here, I only realized that I should not (make) friends with people (like them anymore), taking drugs, playing gambling machines..."

David also did not want to miss sharing a bitter story of his past,

"... [W]hen I came out, I wondered what was going to happen to me. So if they (past peer friends) want to know about me, they (will) come to me. I have my own way to focus (now), so I'm focusing on that! I don't care what they (old friends) will say about me later? Ever since I was in this place (prison), they never came to me. It's me (all alone) take care of myself!"

From the excerpts, we can feel the sense of remorse and discouragement expressed by the young offenders who recalled their bad social life where they believed made them wild, thus stuck with criminal offences leading to the institutionalization.

Azam extended his story,

"... [T]here are 400 people (inside here), there are so many people from everywhere, they are in here for one reason, and for a bad one!... different kinds of people. But one thing, never trust anyone!! Even though there are rules (and regulations in the prison). Do they care enough to obey them? Even they have ignored their own parents before!"

Likewise, David described in details,

"...[M]y friends... because I used to be outside, drinking and smoking cigarettes, went here and there with them. But when I stuck here, (it is) only my family visits me... That's when I started thinking, how to keep my family, how to choose people, choose what kind of friends... I just learned that here! Here, I also do not have a lot of friends. I get along (with people) just when it's necessary. With people who will help me when I'm in trouble. If they're in trouble, I'll help them... just such friends!"

Bob also shed the same advice,

"...[W]hen I was still in school (previously), during (the) school break time, I was more (socializing) with lots of friends (who were) over my age... 21 (years old).. Coming here (being in prison), I realized that I was wrong to choosing peers over my age."

We can perceive that all respondents were personally aware that the bad influence of friendship has led them to a worse direction of life than they should be.

Appreciate Family Relations

Finally, the researcher observes that the institutionalization experience has given the respondents another golden opportunity to grab and regain love and affection of parents and family members which had been destroyed by their selfishness and ungrateful temperament before entering into the institution.

Bob for example, kept his mind aware of his mother's endless sacrifice,

"Now, I am in here (prison), still, my mother came to see me, my mother (who) paid the lawyer. When the sentence time dues, I can make my mother proud of the education I get here, so when I'm released from here (then), I will not be empty handed! Here (in prison), I have SPM (Malaysian Education Certificate)."

The similar note was commented by David,

"...[I]f I'm out of here (released), I want to be with my family because I've never been close to (my) family. I am the eldest, so my responsibility is great! I'll help them (family) and my dad. My step mum is not working; it's only my father who works, so I want to help my dad."

According to the above quotes, we may interpret that the young offenders have missed their flesh and blood relatives that much only after being separated due to the imprisonment. In fact, we can imagine that the young offenders were matured enough to better appreciate, cherish and respect family relationships and blood ties after experiencing various experiences in the institution.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

From the above explanation, we may explicate that the institutional experience has given respondents a variety of useful life experiences in various forms and circumstances. This study proves that self-management skills are among the key knowledge that young offenders have earned through the institutional period.

Some of the good lessons learned by the young offenders from a prison in Malaysia, among others can be summarized as follows:

We can see obviously that young offenders were consistently focused the discussion by expressing their determination towards improving their former bad habits, attitudes and behaviours to be their most and priority concern over the period of institutionalization.

Hence, it is very disappointing if we do not accept the fact that the young offenders have already begun to show signs of apologetic and repentance towards seriously wanting to personally redeem their past mistakes.

The institutionalization experience has also trained young offenders to be more careful in taking any actions and decisions in life either towards themselves or their family members. We may believe that this encourages them to always think mature and sane before taking any steps that will definitely affect at least, to themselves as well as to their loved ones.

We can also make a note that they are always working to maintain themselves as people who think and behave positively at all times by occupying time to do useful things and work hard to avoid them from engaging in any misconduct or bad influence during the period of imprisonment.

Education remains the main backbone as a key indicator that the young offenders have truly been aware of the potential to contribute positively to the society as other ordinary citizens upon release later.

Besides, they undoubtedly are seen to have been striving to convince their parents and the Prison Authority that they have been honestly willing to advance themselves by acquiring a variety of useful knowledge and/or good education programmes upon release from prison.

It seems that even though they realize they have become criminals during their youth, now they are *in dire* need of useful educational programmes and/or learning activities as a more practical tool to help them rebuild their own self-esteem and resistance.

Moreover, the most prominent lesson learned from these offenders is that they are becoming more knowledgeable about legal education and personal rights especially about the criminal consequences they had committed as well as the impact of the sentence they had to bear during the institutional period.

Finally, the article concludes that even though they had been dragged into the criminal justice system for quite some time, it is learned that young offenders in Malaysia can still gain useful experiences that may have taught them to correct their personal thoughts and mindsets towards managing themselves and to plan on their own future after being released from the institution as ordinary citizens outside.

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