A case study on academic and vocational training for child offenders undergoing a multisystemic therapy-based rehabilitation order in Malaysia

Siti Balqis Mohd Azam a, Siti Hajar Abu Bakar b, Jal Zabdi Mohd Yusoff a, Siti Hajar Abdul Rauf a

a Faculty of Law, Universiti Malaya, Malaysia
b Department of Social Administration & Justice, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Universiti Malaya, Malaysia

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
Academic skills
Vocational training
Child offenders
Community-based rehabilitation
Multisystemic therapy (MST)
Malaysia

ABSTRACT

Education and vocational training play a crucial element in the rehabilitation process of child offenders. They develop valuable characters of an individual, contributing to a long-term positive impact that includes a brighter future and life opportunities. This paper discusses the importance of the Multisystemic therapy (MST) approach, particularly its academic and vocational training input, as a rehabilitation component for child offenders. Based on a case study in Kuala Lumpur that examines the practice of restorative justice in Malaysia’s juvenile justice system, the study emphasizes a community-based rehabilitation program that underlies the MST approach in promoting educational and vocational training for child offenders to show the significant link between social rehabilitation and academic and vocational training. The study confirms that all child offenders who participated in the study had dropped out of school. These individuals did not receive either academic education or vocational training throughout the rehabilitation process in the community. Therefore, this study suggests that the local community-based rehabilitation program for child offender genuinely follow the MST approach, mainly its academic and vocational training input. This suggestion is critical to ensure that the country’s juvenile justice system grants all child offenders the opportunity to pursue an academic education or vocational training. It is vital for their future development.

1. Introduction

Until December 2019, Malaysia’s population is approximately 32.6 million, with 9.7 million (35.5%) of the total number being children (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2019). Like most countries in the world, Malaysia views children as an instrumental human capital of the country that represents the future. Thus, children should never be neglected, nor should they be harmed in any manner.

Table 1 (see Annex 1) shows the surging rate of children in Malaysia implicated in criminal activities. Official figures certainly do not tell the whole story and need to be supplemented with results from self-reported delinquency, which is not available. Nonetheless, these statistics indicate an alarming sign of children’s involvement in criminal activities. The number of children aged 10 to 18 years old (age of criminal responsibility, prescribed in Section 82 of Malaysia’s Penal Code or Act 574) who have committed repeated offenses amounted to 675 cases in 2019, demonstrating a 37.5 percent increase compared to the previous year. The current statistic also shows that growing cases of criminal activities involve children as offenders. For example, 104 children were arrested in 2013 for offenses related to drugs, which dramatically increased to 1132 in 2014 and further rose to 1965 cases in 2019 (Department of Social Welfare Malaysia, 2019a).

Children’s conflict with the law is a global issue. They are also associated with multiple issues. For instance, most child offenders in Australia, consisting of school drop-out, unemployed, do not have any kinds of life and social skills, and encounter with multiple health issues and behavioral problems (Queensland Government, 2019). In Pakistan, most of the children who conflict with the law constitute of individuals who are deflection from school, deficient in self-control, involved with some kinds of substance abuse (i.e., cigarettes, drugs), and involved in various kind of delinquent activities (Panezai, Panezai, Wassan & Saqib, 2020). The same attributes were observed in Thailand. Panezai et al.
(2020) found the majority of child offenders in Thailand come from the extended family structure (i.e., father, mother, uncles, grandparents, and cousins all living in the same household), self-control deficits, involves in antisocial behaviors (i.e., skipping classes, gang fight), lack of daily activities schedule and involve with at-risk peers.

Table 1 Children Convicted by Type of Offences from 2013 until 2019, Malaysia.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Offences</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2018</th>
<th>2019</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Property-related crimes</td>
<td>2621</td>
<td>2142</td>
<td>1666</td>
<td>1713</td>
<td>1606</td>
<td>1403</td>
<td>1035</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People-related crimes</td>
<td>968</td>
<td>779</td>
<td>633</td>
<td>653</td>
<td>741</td>
<td>692</td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repeated offence</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>371</td>
<td>417</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>491</td>
<td>675</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor Offences Act</td>
<td>906</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infringement of Supervision</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>1132</td>
<td>1406</td>
<td>1522</td>
<td>1871</td>
<td>1744</td>
<td>1965</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gambling</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weapon/Fire Arms</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traffic</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>368</td>
<td>598</td>
<td>498</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escaping from an Approved School</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>568</td>
<td>651</td>
<td>592</td>
<td>557</td>
<td>673</td>
<td>644</td>
<td>591</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5584</td>
<td>5524</td>
<td>5086</td>
<td>4886</td>
<td>5934</td>
<td>5969</td>
<td>4833</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


n/a = not available.

The deinstitutionalized movement and the restorative justice system’s introduction motivate the criminal justice system in many countries to offer alternative rehabilitation interventions. One of the interventions is community-based rehabilitation under the diversion program or strategy. Various types of community-based rehabilitation with different approaches have been introduced to rehabilitate child offenders. One of them is the MST approach. MST is proven effective in rehabilitating child offenders (Boxer, Kubik, Ostermann & Veysey 2015; Porter & Nuntavisit, 2016; Vidal, Steeger, Caron, Lasher & Connell, 2017; Van der Stouwe, Asscher, Stams, Dekovic & Van der Laan, 2014), children involved in substances abuse (Zajac, Randall & Swenson, 2015), and also useful in preventing recidivism and reforming the behavior of child offenders (Schmucker & Loebl, 2017; Bonnie, Johnson, Chemers & Schuck, 2013). MST would be appropriate to fulfill social rehabilitation needs that encouraged various social sectors’ involvement, which this paper considered vital for child development.

MST-based rehabilitation intervention emphasizes academic and vocational training, as its belief those two components played a crucial role in child offenders. With this realization, Malaysia has introduced multiple alternative rehabilitation interventions, with education and vocational training being the most critical in rehabilitating child offenders. Numerous studies have shown that education has a positive impact on an individual, which includes securing better job opportunities with the advantage of receiving a decent income (Carnevale & Smith, 2018; Chongmin, 2017; Chua Kenn, 2016).

Besides, international frameworks on social legislation of children’s wellbeing, such as the Riyadh Guidelines, have highlighted the importance of education and vocational training. In addition to family, community, and media, the Riyadh Guidelines highly regards education as a critical social agent to rehabilitate child offenders through behavioral reformation (Development Services Group, 2019; Davis, Catherine, & Janet, 2016). Vocational training presents an alternative intervention for child offenders or children who drop out of school, are unemployed and are at risk of being involved in criminal activities. Previous research has shown vocational training can reduce recidivism rates effectively by providing child offenders with technical skills, literacy, and numeracy lessons, as well as motivation and employment opportunities (Hadi & Wan Azlinda, 2015). Vocational training is a type of education that aims to create or increase skills and capabilities for an individual to obtain a job by receiving relevant certifications. Vocational training enganges children in constructive activities and fosters employability and the ability to reintegrate into society successfully (Sekolah Tunas Bakti, 2020; Izdaily Nurul Ain, 2019). Multisystemic therapy-based rehabilitation consists of four components: (1) family intervention, (2) peers’ interventions, (3) educational and vocational intervention, and (4) community support system intervention (Hengele, Schoenwald, Borduin, Rowland & Cunningham, 2009). Academic and vocational training is an essential component of MST-based social rehabilitation for child offenders; thus, they need to be embedded in the rehabilitation program. A qualitative survey was conducted to examine this component’s implementation into a community-based rehabilitation program for child offenders in Malaysia. Concerning this objective, one of the questions that the study sought to answer as to what extent the community-based rehabilitation order for child offenders concern the children’s educational and vocational training necessities; following the MST approach? This paper clarifies whether the social rehabilitation program’s delivery and execution follow the ideal MST principles and approaches, particularly its educational and vocational training component. Related to this first inquiry, this paper discusses the importance of the Multisystemic therapy (MST) approach, particularly its academic and vocational training input, as one of the rehabilitation components for child offenders. All the inputs gathered are instrumental in improving the existing educational and vocational training component of the MST-based social rehabilitation order for child offenders in Malaysia. They provide essential insights into providing child offenders with more efficient community-based rehabilitation and supporting their educational achievements. The improvement would contribute to the refinement of the rehabilitation program’s delivery and execution process, re-designing the rehabilitation program following the MST principles and strategies, and providing avenues for all the Malaysian society sectors to collaborate in implementing the program. All these outcomes are crucial for the program’s effectiveness in rehabilitating child offenders in Malaysia and preventing committed repeated offenders among children.

2. Literature review

2.1. Social rehabilitation concept

Rehabilitation had been a common intervention adopted by many countries (i.e., the United States of America, Singapore, Thailand, Japan, Britain, Australia, Malaysia) to assist children who found conflict with a country’s law. According to the WHO (2020), rehabilitation is a set of interventions designed to optimize functioning and reduce disability in individuals with health conditions interacting with their environment. Rehabilitation helps an individual be as independent as possible in everyday activities and enables participation in education, work, recreation, and meaningful life roles such as taking care of the family. It does so by addressing underlying conditions (such as pain) and improving how individuals’ function in everyday life, supporting them to overcome difficulties with thinking, seeing, hearing, communicating, eating, or moving around. Meanwhile, Nieszluchowski (2013) describes social rehabilitation as an effort to improve a person’s...
Social functioning. It includes enhancing the capability of individuals with mental disorders, physical impairments, or disabilities. For criminal offenders, social rehabilitation helps them establish new ways of life. Such an endeavor is achieved by implementing various services and assistance tailored to fulfilling the individual’s needs.

Social rehabilitation aims to attain a person’s functional ability in various social situations for fulfilling the needs and the right to achieve maximum potential in the individual participation within society (Simpson, Mercer, Simpson, Lawrence & Wyke, 2018). Social functioning is achieved through group activities and community organizations’ participation (American Psychological Association, 2020). For children and young offenders, social rehabilitation can be specific to a process of the offender being reformed to the natural condition of obeying societal norms, reintegrated when engaged and equipped with self-functioning skills to be a productive citizen (Simpson et al., 2018).

In some selected countries (i.e., the U.S.A, Australia, Norway), the multystemic therapy (MST) approach were found to be applicable in achieving the goal of social rehabilitation for young offenders through behavioral and cognitive change (ASEAN Three Conference on Probation and Non-custodial Measures, 2014; Siemionow, 2020), social skills development (Van der Stouwe, Asscher, Hoeve, Van der Laan & Stams, 2020, Van der Stouwe, Asscher, Hoeve, Van der Laan & Stams, 2016), and educational and vocational training (Hadli & Wan Azlinda, 2015). Those countries have a particular legal system to administer their child offenders (Young, Greer & Church, 2017; Meade, 2016). In the US, for instance, its rehabilitation programs for child offenders include group homes, partial release supervision, and halfway houses (Mallett & Todor, 2018). This achievement can be established further with support to the daily living through employment, transportation, and appropriate housing and services to help young offenders initiate new, noncriminal ways of life and become productive members of the community.

2.2. Social rehabilitation programs for child offenders

Social rehabilitation for child offenders can be grouped into three approaches (Loeb, Waung & Sheeran, 2015). First, diversion - an action to remove child offenders from criminal justice processing and, frequently, redirection to community support services (The Beijing Rules, 1985). Diversion program for child offender come in multiple forms, includes police-led (e.g., caution and warning programs, civil citation programs), service coordination (e.g., case management, wraparound services), counseling/skill-building (e.g., individual-based treatment, family-based treatment, mentoring, skill-building programs) and restorative justice (e.g., victim-offender mediation (VOM), family group conferences (FGC), teen court) (Farrell, Betsinger & Hammond, 2018). The second is community-based rehabilitation. A community-based treatment is the best opportunity to promote, simultaneously, the best interests of the community and the best interests of the child offender as proposed by the Convention on the Rights of the Children (CRC) (1990). It can be divided into two categories; (1) ‘custodial’ such as suspended sentences, compulsory drug treatment orders, and home detention, and (2) ‘non-custodial’ sentencing options such as supervision/parole, community service orders, probation, and good behavior bonds (Australian Law Reform Commission, 2019). The third approach is institutional-based rehabilitation. Based on CRC, institutional treatment should be used only as a measure of last resort. Typically, it is for serious, violent, or chronic offenders at high risk for recidivism (Development Services Group, 2019). The objective of training and treatment of child offenders placed in institutions is to provide care, protection, education, and vocational skills, to assist them to assume socially constructive and productive roles in society. Thus, children in institutions shall receive care, protection, and all necessary social assistance such as educational, vocational, psychological, medical, and physical that they may require because of their age, sex, and personality and in the interest of their healthy development (The Beijing Rules, 1985).

Not take into account the rehabilitation approaches, for child or young offenders and delinquent (i.e., children pregnant out of wedlock and children beyond control), social rehabilitation encompasses efforts to increase their wellbeing and social function (Cuellar & Dave, 2016; Henggeier, 2012; Sawyer & Borduin, 2011). The efforts involve measures to remedy, restore, restructure the children’s attitudes and behavior, and equip them with life and social skills that are practical for their future (Siti Balaqis, 2015). Examples of social rehabilitation programs for child offenders are comprehensive competency development programs suitable to the children’s needs, dialogue segments with the local community, faith-based rehabilitation program, cognitive restructuring protocol program, particular counseling program for child offenders, and MST programs.

In some juvenile justice system such as in the United States of America, Japan, and Nigeria, social rehabilitation is a conventional approach adopted to rehabilitate and control children who involved with a status offense behavior; penalization of children engaged in behavior such as truancy, running away from home, violating curfew, underage use of alcohol, general ungovernability, and being “beyond control” that would not be considered an offense if committed by adults (Development Services Group, 2015). In those countries mentioned in the previous sentence, the doer is called “status offender.” The aim of social rehabilitation for these children is to prevent them from committing worse behavior or being involved in crimes. The United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice (Beijing Rules) and CRC suggest several rehabilitative interventions for young offenders involved in status offense behavior. It includes care and supervision programs, community service, monetary penalties such as bond of good behavior, compensation, counseling, foster care, and other educational measures (Nong & Yusoff, 2018).

The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) refers to child offenders or children in conflict with the law as an individual under 18 admitted into one’s criminal justice system due to being suspect or convicted of criminal offenses (Verstraeten, 2016). The Beijing Rules, 1985, referred this children to as delinquent juveniles and juvenile offenders. In Malaysia, juvenile offenders refer to a child convicted of property-related crimes, people-related crimes, minor offenses, infringement of supervision term, drug, gamble, weapon/firearms, traffic, and escaping from an Approves School (Department of Social Welfare Malaysia, 2019b). In most cases, the aim of social rehabilitation for child offenders is to restore them into society and to reform them with new social values and moral values, and to mold them into benefit behavior or good deed, which in the long run could help them to contribute to their society (Manjaria, 2014; Meyer, 1969). The intervention programs to rehabilitate child offenders include psychiatry treatment, vocational training, social skill development training, educational programs, and employment initiative (Duus-Otterstrom, 2007).

2.3. The framework of the multystemic therapy (MST)

This study adopted the structural framework of multystemic therapy (MST) as a guideline to the implementation of community-based rehabilitation for child offenders.

2.3.1. What actually is MST?

Scott Henggeier introduced multystemic therapy (MST) in 1978 as an approach to rehabilitation therapy (Hilleg, Brand, Mulder, Vermeiren & van Domburg, 2017). MST is a family and community-based intervention that was initially developed for juvenile offenders. In its early development period, MST emphasized rehabilitation children who were involved in criminal behaviors. Later, MST practice was expanded to rehabilitate children or individuals who are with disassociative disorders issue, psychiatry patients, children with suicide attempt, individuals with addiction to illicit substances (such as drugs and alcohol), addiction abuse, neglect of parents / guardians (Zajac et al., 2015; Vidal
et al., 2017; Lux, 2016), and eating disorders or obesity (American Diabetes Association, 2008). “Multisystemic” was referred to as the core assumption that risk factors for anti-social behavior in children could occur in any social system, which a child was enmeshed. This approach originated from Bronfenbrenner’s social-ecological framework, who suggested that individual behaviors were influenced directly and indirectly by multiple social systems, in particular, within a microsystem such as family, peer, school, and community (Zajac et al., 2015; Lux, 2016). Therefore, every component of an intervention or a program under MST would include these multiple systems or microsystem agents. Several examples of this intervention or program could be family intervention, peer intervention, educational and vocational training intervention, and social support for families within the community or individual home.

2.3.2. MST technique in rehabilitating child offenders

This study focused on the academic and vocational training component of MST, specifically, the role of microsystem agents in sustaining the academic growth and vocational skills of the children. Education was a crucial element in rehabilitating these children for the prospective long-term positive impact in the future, such as securing job opportunities, obtaining a decent paycheck and cultivation of self-belief. Previous studies (i.e., Abotsi, Yaganumah & Obeng, 2018; UNICEF & Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2017; Latif, Coudhary & Hammadun, 2015; Nagaraj, Lee, Goh & Teyd, 2016; Adelman & Szekely, 2016) had proven that children who dropped out of school or did not complete school were highly associated with difficult life situations in adulthood (i.e., problems in securing jobs or obtaining low income). Furthermore, the physical difficulties faced by children can also be a contributing factor to be involved in criminal activities and subsequent recidivism (Chongmin, 2017; Young, Greer & Church, 2017).

MST belief that agents of social systems, in particular, within a microsystem such as family, peer, school, and community shape children’s behavior (Zajac et al., 2015; Lux, 2016). The manifestation of criminogenic risk factors and protective factors in these agents develop a child’s personality and behavior. Risk factors (i.e., domestic violence, family lack of control or supervision, problematic family, dysfunctional family, parents’ addiction to substances, and the child’s sexual abuse experience) furnish an occasion for a child to involve in criminal or antisocial behavior (Hillege, Brand, Mulder, Vermeiren & van Domburgh, 2017). On the other hand, protective factors consist of attributes that can protect, alleviate and restore children’s behaviors, or prevent them from involving in criminal activities or behaviors (Andrew, Howells & Rickwood, 2004). The juvenile justice system in many countries (i.e., Australia, Thailand, Japan, U.S.A) that adopt the MST approach in their community-based rehabilitation program handling these risk and protective factors in their MST program as its critical strategy in safeguarding child wellbeing (The Seminar on Promoting Community-Based Treatment in The ASEAN Region, 2015; Lux, 2016; Queensland Government, 2019).

Embracing the socio-ecological point of view, MST agrees that it is crucial to understand the child’s behavior within its natural context. Thus, before implementing the intervention, MST would first conduct a preliminary assessment of the factors contributing to children’s involvement in criminal activities. MST determines intervention or treatment that is most appropriate for the children’s problems and needs. MST responses to several critical risk factors, including the child’s factor (i.e., cognitive problems, history of academic failure, substance abuse, mental disorders), family factor (i.e., family support for completing school assignments at home, family interaction patterns, disciplinary practices, parental control), peer factor (i.e., drug addicts, school dropouts), neighborhood factor (i.e., at-risk neighborhood, population density), school factor (i.e., school leadership models, classroom conditions, school management, safety levels) and poor relationship/communication between family members and schools (Henggeler, Schoenwald, Borduin, Rowland & Cunningham, 2009; Henggeler & Schaeffer, 2016).

At the early stage of the rehabilitation intervention, MST tries to intensify family functional capacity to effectively control, supervise, monitor, and support their children. MST also assist families to restore their relationship through various strategies, such as effective communication and effective parenting. MST always emphasizes the family system because it views this social system as a crucial agent in rehabilitating a child (Lux, 2016). Collaborates with the other agents in the microsystem, such as the peers (i.e., involvement with prosocial peers), schools (i.e., reentry to school, academic programs), and community (i.e., participation in community activities), MST helps families to develop and perform interventions that either could reduce a child criminal behavior or increase the child functional capacity (Lux, 2016; Henggeler et al., 2009). MST portrays the substantial roles of the agents in the microsystem through Fig. 1 below.

2.3.3. MST technique done in the community-based rehabilitation order

Previous research has also shown that the responsibility to develop a child’s positive and pro-social character involves the contribution of all microsystem agents, in particular the family and the community (Adebovale & Anifowose, 2017; Nikitorowicz, Sawicki & Zykiewicz-Plonska, 2017; Henggeler & Schaeffer, 2016; Lux, 2016). These agents have distinctive roles and responsibilities in shaping the pro-social behavior of children and their subsequent achievement of academic success. As an example, the family plays a vital role in monitoring the learning process; as well as participating in school-based activities such as parent-teacher conferences, volunteer activities, and various forms of parental activism, workshops and parents’ seminars. On the other hand, the role of the community is to identify and integrate community services and resources to support and strengthen schools, students and their families. It includes providing information on community health for students and families, providing cultural, recreational, social and other programs/services, as well as information on community activities related to learning skills and talent, such as summer programs for students (Durisic & Bunjievac, 2017).

However, an initiative to develop or facilitate collaboration between these microsystem agents is not an easy task. Previous research has revealed the occurrence of conflict between school and family in relation to poor academic performance of children and behavioral problems. Some parents or caregivers continue to blame school and teachers for the poor academic performance and behavior of children. On the other hand, school staff may blame the family for failing to help the children succeed and often report that the family is not involved in the children’s schooling experience (Durisic & Bunjievac, 2017; Bower, 2017). Children whose parents lack interest in their children’s education and parents’ low expectations on the return of education are at high risk of dropout (Dinu, 2015). Children whose parents do not show concern about their children’s study and do not participate in children’s school activities are also at-risk for truancy, involve in antisocial and criminal activities, and dropout (Dinu, 2015). Previous studies have also recognized that collaboration between parents and teachers is essential for positive educational achievement for students at risk for behavioral problems (Kranke & Klevan, 2019).

Therefore, to help child offenders gain academic and vocational training opportunities, MST has developed several intervention options that encourage academic and vocational success. MST has also sought to remove potential barriers that may hinder its implementation by conducting school-related evaluations. This inter education and intervention was intended to stimulate active participation and a joint effort between the school, the family, and the community to develop and then implement a rehabilitation program that meets the child offender’s educational and vocational needs. It is consistent with the main objectives of MST, which are to ensure that children remain in school, improve academic performance, reduce truancy, and prevent severe disciplinary actions such as expulsion or long-term suspension (Pront, Kuiper, Smit, Stams, Popma, Mulder & van den Berg, 2020).
MST groups its core academic and vocational training interventions into four techniques and/or strategies. The first strategy is intervention to eliminate behavioral problems in schools. It involves gathering support from parents to encourage children to reform their behavior through a variety of activities to reward children’s pro-social behavior, such as classroom activities (i.e., leisure or play time), food or beverage rewards, tokens or vouchers to purchase items at the school store, and social interactions and relationships with exemplary or best school students (Henggeler et al., 2009). In addition, several initiatives can be implemented to address children’s behavioral problems at school. It includes the promotion of effective communication between schools and parents. Schools may, for example, send home notes and flyers about children’s misconduct as well as notice of important events and activities. At the same time, parents can provide teachers with information about their child’s educational history, health and behavior at home. These measures will provide clarity for both parties on the development of children, both at home and at school, which will then help to identify children’s problems (Martinez, 2015).

The second technique or strategy is intervention to cultivate effective collaboration among the microsystem agents. The aim of this intervention is to foster active and sustainable collaboration between multiple agents. It includes the family (i.e., parents, siblings, caregivers, aunts and uncles and grandparents), school staff and other social sectors of the community (i.e., social services, juvenile justice, law enforcement, civic organizations, and religious organizations, business). Numerous researchers recognize the importance of family and community involvement in school to help improve the performance of children in school. For example, Bower (2017) argued that stimulating parent participation in schools and cultivating certain types of community involvement in schools could reduce the incidence of delinquency and act as a preventive force against potential delinquency, thus reducing dependence on reactive disciplinary policies. Meanwhile, Wilson (2019) found that community sectors, such as social services, juvenile justice and law enforcement, significantly reduced school violent incidents and helped to foster a sense of being for children. Strong relationships between parents and schools through increased parental involvement in school activities may give parents the opportunity to pass on their knowledge and skills to children, such as information on how to act properly and how to avoid delinquent behavior while in school (Durisic & Bunijevac, 2017). Strong relationships between communities and schools through active participation by community agencies in school activities provide opportunities for children to learn from other actors about the importance of ethical behavior and even to develop their own relationships with such community groups. Overall, the development of partnerships between parents, communities, and schools can not only strengthen children’s relationships with each of these entities, but can also help schools achieve their goal of reducing crime and improving discipline management (Bower, 2017).

The third strategy is intervention to support school performance and behavior at home. This intervention emphasizes the role of parents or caregivers as support systems to promote the academic performance and ethical behavior of children at home. The first activity is to stimulate better school performance and behavior at home by praising the child’s efforts and achievements, raising awareness of the importance of education and identifying and discussing school subjects or activities that correspond to their interests and skills. The second activity involves creating an environment or routine that stimulates the completion of school assignments, such as providing quiet space (i.e., without sound disturbances, television or children’s voices playing), providing supplies for study (i.e., pen, desk lamp, papers) and developing daily homework planners. The third method is to reward children’s academic achievement or any effort made to change their behavior (Henggeler et al., 2009; Martinez, 2015).

Technique number four is an alternative education program for dropped out or not completing school children. Article 29 (1) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) promotes the right to education (UNICEF, 2007). In the case of children refusing to continue their education, the right incentive must be given to encourage their participation in any vocational training program in order to shape a better future for these children and to prevent recidivism. Preventive intervention is therefore critical for children who have not completed school education, remain unemployed and are at risk of becoming involved in criminal activities. Thus, MST has introduced a number of initiatives for children who have dropped out of school or are not interested in continuing school. The first initiative is to prevent school dropouts through a communication strategy. MST took action by communicating the long-term importance of completing high school and the downside of dropping out. It includes the disclosure of the consequences of falling out into their future; in particular the economic impact and negative impact on children’s well-being, and the comparison of the advantages and disadvantages of continuing their studies, and vice versa. The second initiative is to provide alternatives to school completion. This intervention was one of the options when a child was unable to maintain or continue schooling. MST therefore sought to identify other options or alternatives available to children in this situation, such as vocational skills or training. MST help children develop marketable skills that will enable them to engage in productive activities later in life. In the US, for example, most rehabilitation programs that use the MST approach would encourage children to participate in the General Educational Diploma (GED) and High School Equivalence Test (HiSET) programs. GED and HiSET are options for children to obtain a diploma equivalent to a high school diploma (Muhlhausen & Hurwitz, 2019). Employment is the third initiative. This intervention helps parents or caregivers to understand the strengths and weaknesses of their children’s entry into the work environment and helps parents / caregivers to develop plans for their children to prepare for work, such as encouraging them to participate in any vocational training program. The Community Restitution Apprentice-Focused Training (CRAFT) is an example of a vocational training program that is effective in helping to improve the functionality of child offenders. Previous research has shown that CRAFT significantly increases the employment rate of children. CRAFT is a six-month employment program designed to train and employ high-risk children and juvenile offenders in the construction industry. It is a “community partnership program” involving the collaboration of macro-system agents such as the business company (construction industry), the juvenile justice system and education agencies (Schaeffer, Henggeler, Ford, Mann, Chang & Chapman, 2014). The final initiative is to encourage parents / caregivers to support...
children who are not in school. MST perceived that children who are not in school need constant support to ensure success in the future (Henggeler et al., 2009). Two actions must be taken by parents or caregivers or other family members to help these children. First, there is a need to monitor the development of children. It may include monitoring the development of a child participating in a GED program or an employment/job training course. Second, parents or caregivers must provide children with resources that include information, finance and transportation. They also need to have a fixed plan for their children.

3. Methodology

3.1. Case study approach

This study adopts the descriptive case study tradition of a qualitative approach. The design was chosen because its inductive approach helps to obtain a clear picture of the implementation of the MST approach into the social rehabilitation order. The case study is an investigation into a phenomenon in a real-life situation. It helps to gather in-depth information on issues such as “How is the program being conducted?” and “Why do things happen?” The descriptive case study asked the question “How?” and “Why” to explain a specific social phenomenon (Thomas, 2011). It presents a specific picture of the situation, the social order or the relationship.

The type, which is a single case study, focuses only on the case of a community-based rehabilitation program for children involved in minor criminal offenses. In particular, the case is the Bond of Good Behavior - order of the court that requires an offender to be of good behavior and not re-offend for a specified period. The court can impose conditions that an offender must comply with during the term of the bond. It is a form of community-based sentencing/nocustodial options for children or adult offenders (Australian Law Reform Commission, 2019). For the juvenile justice system of Malaysia, Section 91(1)(b) Child Act 2001 “if a Court For Children is satisfied that an offence has been proved the Court shall, in addition to any other powers exercisable by virtue of this Act, have power to discharge the child upon his executing a bond to be of good behavior and to comply with such conditions as may be imposed by the Court.” The researcher has not repeatedly explored the implementation of this program in private institutions or non-profit organizations. The study also did not include other target groups, such as children beyond control and pregnant out of wedlock. Only one group was involved in the investigation: children who were apprehended to commit minor criminal offenses. The structure of a single case study allowed the researcher to delve deeper into the study’s issue and understand the group culture in an actual situation over a long time.

3.2. Population, sample of the study and sampling technique

This study’s analysis unit is a social rehabilitation order for children who have committed minor criminal offenses, not repeated offenders. It focused on the implementation aspects of the social rehabilitation order, and one of its inquiry is on the educational and vocational training-based intervention for the children. At the moment, there is only one community-based order for children who committed minor criminal offenses in Malaysia, which is the Bond of Good Behavior. Thus, it is inevitably eligible to be chosen as the study’s unit analysis. The population of this study was, therefore, involved in the implementation of the rehabilitation order. It included a child offender, a key informant, a probation officer, and informal sources such as the child’s parent/caregiver.

The study employed the purposive sampling technique, the criterion sampling to select the study participants for the study, and the inclusion criteria established earlier. The sample selection was based on the expectation or foreknowledge of the relevance and rich information related to the research questions, gain from individuals or social group that experienced or involved in the investigated phenomenon (Creswell, 2007 pp. 118–120). The inclusion criteria for selecting the case and the sample were:

child offenders who were ordered by the Children Court to undergo the community-based rehabilitation order under Section 91(1)(b) – Bond of Good Behavior, practitioners involved in the execution of the rehabilitation order, parents/guardians and community member of the selected child offenders who participate in the study, and

Physical-emotionally stable/healthy and capable of communicating.

Altogether, twenty participants were involved in the study. They consist of nine children who have committed offenses (under Section 91(1)(b) of the Child Act 2001), eight staff members (i.e., probation officers, court counselors, counselors, National Anti-Drugs Agency officers) involved in the delivery of social rehabilitation orders and three parents/caregivers. However, this paper subtracts data from only the nine children who have committed offenses and undergo the community-based social rehabilitation order. Creswell (2013 pp. 75–76) suggested no more than four to five cases for a case study in qualitative research, whereas Dworkin (2012) suggested five to fifty participants as adequate for a qualitative study. Smaller samples are used in qualitative research because the general aim of sampling in qualitative research is to acquire information that is useful for understanding the complexity, depth, variation, or context surrounding a phenomenon, rather than to represent populations as in quantitative research (Gentles, Charles, Ploeg & McKibbon, 2015).

For the nine children who participated in this study, the researchers selected them using the criterion sampling technique. They are child offenders under the 91 (1) (b) category. With the Social Welfare Department of Malaysia’s authorization, the researcher approached one of the Probation officers responsible for the Children’s Department in Kuala Lumpur to propose 15 children undergoing the community-based rehabilitation order. From the 15 proposed names, the researcher then consulted a child counselor from the same department to confirm the participants’ health/emotional conditions and communication capabilities. The counselor advised nine out of the fifteen children who fit the inclusion criteria of the study. The researcher then approached the nine child offenders, suggested by the counselor. Table 2 (see annex 1) presents a brief background of the nine children who have committed offenses, undergo the community-based social rehabilitation order, and participate in this study.

3.3. MST and the research instrument

The primary instrument used to collect the raw data was the interview protocol, which was designed following the MST approach and techniques, mainly its academic and vocational training component. The instrument consists of five sections; the relationship between the children with their school, parents and school’s involvement in the rehabilitation process, school-based intervention in the rehabilitation program, and alternative initiatives for children who do not attend school during the rehabilitation process. This study involved three interview protocols (IP):

IP for the child offenders who undergo the rehabilitation order
IP for the practitioners (i.e., probation officers, counselors, court advisor) that involve in the execution of the rehabilitation order
IP for parents and community members of the child offenders

The main technique to gather the primary data is an in-depth interview. The researcher conducted the interviews using the IP as the guideline. The interview guide’s themes were inspired by the MST’s educational and vocational training component – child offenders’ issues with school, interventions related to school problems, and options for attaining academic and vocational training (Henggeler et al., 2009).
The researcher used an in-depth interview technique to collect the data from this study. The study needs to interview all the participants, including child offenders who were undergoing social rehabilitation in a community setting, to gain real and in-depth inputs on their live experiences managing and participating in the rehabilitation program. The researcher had previously developed a set of interview protocols as a guide during the interview session. The interviews were conducted in the Malay language (the national language), as all the children who participated in the study were comfortable with the language and are a handicap in another language, English language in particular. However, interviews among the practitioners were conducted in dual-language (English and Bahasa Melayu), depending on their preferences. The researcher interviewed the children on a one-to-one basis, which lasted for 60 to 90 min, in a physical surrounding suggested by the children. The researcher explained the process of the interview with the children. They can opt-out of the interview at any time if they feel uncomfortable with any of the questions or situation. All the interviews were recorded and then transcribed. The researcher collected and analyzed data at the same time to construct coherent interpretations of the data (Zanaton, Salasiah Hanin, Tengku Intan Zarina & Mohd Noor, 2016). This study used a manual coding method to facilitate and speed up managing, analyzing, and interpreting the data collected. The data analysis process was conducted following Halcomb and Davidson (2006)’s six steps of analyzing qualitative data; (1) audiotaping of interview and concurrent note taking, (2) reflective journaling immediately post-interview, (3) listening the audiotape and amending/revision of field notes and observations, (4) preliminary content analysis, (5) secondary content analysis, and (6) thematic review.

3.4. Data collection and analysis

The researcher used an in-depth interview technique to collect the data from this study. The study needs to interview all the participants, including child offenders who were undergoing social rehabilitation in a community setting, to gain real and in-depth inputs on their live experiences managing and participating in the rehabilitation program. The researcher had previously developed a set of interview protocols as a guide during the interview session. The interviews were conducted in the Malay language (the national language), as all the children who participated in the study were comfortable with the language and are a handicap in another language, English language in particular. However, interviews among the practitioners were conducted in dual-language (English and Bahasa Melayu), depending on their preferences. The researcher interviewed the children on a one-to-one basis, which lasted for 60 to 90 min, in a physical surrounding suggested by the children. The researcher explained the process of the interview with the children. They can opt-out of the interview at any time if they feel uncomfortable with any of the questions or situation. All the interviews were recorded and then transcribed. The researcher collected and analyzed data at the same time to construct coherent interpretations of the data (Zanaton, Salasiah Hanin, Tengku Intan Zarina & Mohd Noor, 2016). This study used a manual coding method to facilitate and speed up managing, analyzing, and interpreting the data collected. The data analysis process was conducted following Halcomb and Davidson (2006)’s six steps of analyzing qualitative data; (1) audiotaping of interview and concurrent note taking, (2) reflective journaling immediately post-interview, (3) listening the audiotape and amending/revision of field notes and observations, (4) preliminary content analysis, (5) secondary content analysis, and (6) thematic review.

3.5. Ethics approvals

This study was conducted in 2018 under the supervision of the Research Ethics Unit, University of Malaya, Malaysia. Participation of the children was voluntary – with the selected child’s agreement and their parents/guardians’ permission. Before initiating the data collection, the researcher explained the study’s objectives and then proceeded to seek informed consent to participate in the study. For this purpose, the researcher provided a form of consent to the participation of the study. This form entails the researcher’s responsibility to safeguard the children’s identities and security and entails considerable responsibilities on the children to be trustworthy and responsible participants. Informed consent also was required from the parents as this study involved a fragile minor group. The researchers also maintained the participants’ confidentiality and privacy in this study by using pseudonyms to take into account the sensitive and personal information disclosed. During the interview, to ensure the children’s privacy, the interview with the children was conducted in the presence of a responsible adult, who in most cases was a probation officer. The children were interviewed in a physical setting preferred by the children, with their parents/guardians or their probation officer present in a distant space; thus, the parents/guardians could not hear the interviews and could not be involved in the interview between the researcher and the children. The purpose of qualitative research has been directed toward providing in-depth explanations and meanings rather than generalizing finding (Carminati, 2018). Thus, the meaningfulness and usefulness of a study’s results are determined by its trustworthiness; rigor of a study that refers to the degree of confidence in data, interpretation, and methods used to ensure the quality of the study (Polit & Beck, 2014). The researchers triangulate the information collected from the children with the probation officers, counselors, their parents/guardians, peers, and schools to secure trustworthiness. The researchers also confirmed the findings based on the participants’ responses and ensured no potential bias or any personal motivation imposed in the data. Also, the researcher ensured that detailed transcription, systematic plan and coding was conducted. The researchers arranged a meeting with the Social Welfare Department’s child counselors for children who may have need counseling following the interview.

4. Findings

All the children who participated in the study either failed to complete their school or dropped out of school. The study also found that, throughout the rehabilitation process, there was no single intervention aimed at encouraging the academic and vocational needs of children. There has even been a lack of intervention which has attempted to encourage the readmittance / re-entry of children to schools or to encourage their participation in vocational training skills. The schools were not informed about the children’s detention. According to the Child Act 2001, Malaysia, a child’s detention should be informed to only several concerned individuals. Section 83A(2) Child Act 2001 stated, “when a child is arrested, he shall be informed of his grounds of arrest, and a police officer shall, as soon as may be, before commencing any form of questioning or recording of any statement from the child, communicate to the parent or guardian, or relative of the child and a probation officer to inform the child’s whereabouts; the grounds of the child’s arrest; and the right to consult with a counsel of the child’s choice”.

Details of the findings presented below on specific themes derived from the analysis, which is based on the MST framework concerning the educational and vocational training component.

4.1. Dropping out of school

A thorough assessment of the children’s probation report revealed that all of them did not complete or drop out of school. In response to the researcher’s question, “Are you still in school?” the children revealed:

**Azi**: I used to go to school, but I did not go starting from April this year. I quit because whenever I am going to school, my friend would pester me every morning, urging me that there is “no need to go to school”, so I was left feeling down. My dad also did not seem to care. There is no one else to encourage me other than my friends, but they wanted me to join them (not attending school).

(Azi, (P1) / 26 October 2017 / 10:30 AM)

**Rish**: I have just quit school. At age 16, when I was in form 4 because of a misunderstanding with the school due to claims that I have been

### Table 2

Profiles of the Child Offenders Participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnic</th>
<th>Type of Crimes</th>
<th>Type of Carers</th>
<th>Parental Occupation</th>
<th>Household Income</th>
<th>School Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Azi</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>Stealing</td>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>Cleaner</td>
<td>Less than RM1000</td>
<td>Dropout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rish</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>Robbery</td>
<td>Adoptive Parents</td>
<td>Mechanic</td>
<td>Less than RM2500</td>
<td>Dropout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emy</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>Drug</td>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>Mechanic</td>
<td>Less than RM1500</td>
<td>Dropout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mira</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>Stealing</td>
<td>Single mother</td>
<td>Cleaner</td>
<td>Less than RM1000</td>
<td>Dropout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imm</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>Stealing</td>
<td>Grandparents</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>Less than RM3000</td>
<td>Dropout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yos</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>Fire Arms</td>
<td>Single mother</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>Less than RM2000</td>
<td>Dropout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tin</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>Drug</td>
<td>Single mother</td>
<td>Masseuse</td>
<td>Less than RM2000</td>
<td>Dropout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Som</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>Drug</td>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>Driver</td>
<td>Less than RM3000</td>
<td>Dropout</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Profiles of the Child Offenders Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnic</th>
<th>Type of Crimes</th>
<th>Type of Carers</th>
<th>Parental Occupation</th>
<th>Household Income</th>
<th>School Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Azi</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>Stealing</td>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>Cleaner</td>
<td>Less than RM1000</td>
<td>Dropout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rish</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>Robbery</td>
<td>Adoptive Parents</td>
<td>Mechanic</td>
<td>Less than RM2500</td>
<td>Dropout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emy</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>Drug</td>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>Mechanic</td>
<td>Less than RM1500</td>
<td>Dropout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mira</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>Stealing</td>
<td>Single mother</td>
<td>Cleaner</td>
<td>Less than RM1000</td>
<td>Dropout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imm</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>Stealing</td>
<td>Grandparents</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>Less than RM3000</td>
<td>Dropout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yos</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>Fire Arms</td>
<td>Single mother</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>Less than RM2000</td>
<td>Dropout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tin</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>Drug</td>
<td>Single mother</td>
<td>Masseuse</td>
<td>Less than RM2000</td>
<td>Dropout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Som</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>Drug</td>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>Driver</td>
<td>Less than RM3000</td>
<td>Dropout</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
expelled when I was not yet. After that, I no longer have much interest to go to school. (Rish, (P2) / 13 October 2017 / 9:00 AM)

Eny: When I was detained, I was still in school, in form 5, and I did finish school. (Eny, (P1) / 9 November 2017 / 11.50 AM)

Mira: No, I have already been expelled from school because it is too far and I was late, no money and I was absent too many times, so I was expelled. (Mira, (P1)/ 1 November 2017/10.45 AM)

Yos: No. Before carrying out this order, I went to school. However, after this order, I do not go to school anymore. (Yos, (P1)/16 November 2017/10.15 AM)

Tin: I have not gone to school for a long time. The last time was in January when I was in form 1 in SMK Perempuan Pudu. Kuala Lumpur. During school, I usually skipped because I have no interest in learning. (Tin, (P1)/17 July 2017/10.15 AM)

Analysis of the verbatim text showed that the majority of children in this study were not in school. The researcher found, however, that all of the respondents had previously attended school, but most of them had not completed their education. Factors such as peer pressure and lack of parental supervision, disciplinary problems among children, truancy, expulsion and lack of interest in learning were among the reasons for leaving school. The probation officers responsible for the children's supervision overlook this matter as there are no guidelines about school attendance for children who are undergoing community-based rehabilitation. Also, there is no option concerning alternative schools such as skilled, I applied for a job at my current workplace, Proton (Azi, 26 October 2017/10.30 AM)

Yos: Yes. They did involve school or promote us to complete school. (Yos, (P1) / 9 November 2017 / 11.50 AM)

Tin: No. But my mother forced me to continue school. (Tin, 8 November 2017 / 11.45 AM)

Mira: No. They did advice that my child can continue school, and if she chooses to work, then they advise her to work hard. Nevertheless, it is just in the form of advice without actions. (Mira’s mother, (P1)/21 December 2017 /11.00 AM)

The researcher also asked the same question to the parents or guardians of the children. According to them:

Azi’s mother: Up until my child finished undergoing rehabilitation, we have never met with any of the teachers or have any school involvement. They did advice that my child can continue school, and if she chooses to work, then they advise her to work hard. Nevertheless, it is just in the form of advice without actions. (Azi’s mother, (P1)/10 December 2017/2.00 PM)

Tin’s mother: None. I just went to the National Anti-Drugs Agency. It did not include the teachers or the school. Not at all. I do not know what else to do. I want my child to remain in school. (Tin’s mother, (P1)/21 December 2017 /11.00 AM)

Mr Y: The biggest challenge that we are facing with the school is that there are parents that do not want the probation officers to interact with the school to discuss with the teachers, giving the excuse that they do not want the information concerning their child’s involvement in criminal activities to spread at school. It is one of the elements that causes fear among parents to let probation officers deal directly and foster cooperation with the school administration. (Probation officer, (P3)/24 August 2017/2.00 PM)

Mr X: During the interview, most parents claimed that their child has no problem. However, disciplinary reports from form two until form 5 have stated that the child involved in numerous types of problems such as being caught peeping by members of the public. I am not sure if they are aware of it or trying to hide it. In one case, I told the child’s parents that “Madam, do you know that I have seen the school report, you do not need to lie as the school principal signs the report. Every case dated, the person in charge during the incident, the witnesses present, type of offence and punishment for the offence is all stated”. (Probation officer, (P1)/12 July 2017/9.00 AM)

The above findings demonstrated the complete lack of involvement among teachers and school in the rehabilitation program of the children. There had been absolutely no activity that included teacher or school throughout the child’s enrolment in the rehabilitation programs. The study presumed that one of the factors contributing to this situation was a lack of cooperation from parents, teachers and the school. It might have been due to the forthcoming and secretive manners of three parties which inevitably hindered the implementation of the education-based intervention. These findings are not in favor of the MST strategies concerning the collaboration of parents, schools, community members, and practitioners in ensuring child offenders who undergo rehabilitation processes can vigorously participate and perform in their education. This case study implies that all the four sectors are disintegrated, and there is no initiative to empower them to work as a capable resource to deliver the children’s educational needs.
Based on the text above, the researcher concluded that children involved in criminal offenses were still considering their future or their way of life. Some of the children indicated their intention to continue their studies, especially in vocational courses such as automotive and culinary, while the rest indicated that they wanted to work. In response to this interview, the researcher was interested to know whether a platform had been put in place to update their aspirations and plans. The researcher then asked the children, “When you were undergoing rehabilitation, is there any organized activity involving employment agencies or vocational training?” According to the following:

**Mr. D:** I do not know about this risk assessment. This evaluation phase is conducted by the probation officer when preparing the probation report.

(Counsellor, (P1)/19 Sept. 2017/11.00 AM)

**Mrs. B:** We do not use any assessment tools when preparing children’s probation reports. We assess children based on the social work skills we have learned. We as probation officers actually know the importance of using risk assessment tools but we do not have the skills or exposure to use them.

(Probation Officer, (P1)/7 July 2017/8.20 AM)

**Mr Y:** So far, we do assessment and summarize everything in probation report - about family background, school record, personal trait, behavior and recommendation sentence for the children.

(Probation officer, (P3)/24 August 2017/2.00 PM)

The findings presented in this section prove that the community-based rehabilitation order for child offenders involved in minor criminal activities overlooks the importance of alternative education, particularly vocational training, in its rehabilitation program/activity. The rehabilitation activities fail to follow the MST framework concerning vocational training options for child offenders who show their interest in vocational and prefer to join employment. All child offenders who participated in this study tend to show their interest in vocational (compare to attend school); thus, the country’s juvenile justice system should not overlook the importance of vocational training in the rehabilitation curriculum.

4.4. **Inability to conduct the risk assessment concerning the children’s education and vocational training needs**

MST proposes a thorough risk assessment of child offenders’ educational and vocational training needs, whether they are undergoing rehabilitation in the institution or community setting (Li, Chu, Zeng & Ruby, 2018). The assessment (i.e., concerning educational and vocational training needs, academic achievement, school management, after school activities, school engagement, and school attendance) need to be conducted before delivering the intervention to the child offenders to ensure that the proposed intervention match the children’s needs; as well as to ensure the intervention can address the identifies risk factors virtually (Henggeler & Schaeffer, 2016). However, for the context of this case study, the appraisal was not able to be executed due to a lack of resources. In fact, among the practitioners, they seem confused between the probation report and the risk and needs assessment.

(Yos, 16 November 2017/10.15 AM)

**Rish:** No. My dad opened a workshop and asked me to help around. Now I am planning to go to the GIATMARA skills and training institute. I’ve already applied for it and now I’m helping my dad at the workshop.

(Rish, 13 October 2017/9.00 AM)

**Imm:** I already finished school. I am currently working and am waiting for interview to continue my studies. Before, I was in a culinary program, so now I’m planning to continue studying culinary. I am going to apply at the Sungai Besi camp, the place for interview and selection into the culinary program.

(Imm, 13 October 2017/2.35 PM)

As mentioned above, MST considers multiple causes of child involvement in criminal behavior or activities. For example, it agrees that school is one of the critical social systems for children’s participation in crimes or anti-social behavior. It is a convenient meeting place and training ground for criminal activities or deviant peer groups. A large part of previous research has shown that school is one of the risk factors that contribute to children’s involvement in criminal activities (Backman, 2017; Hirschfield, 2018). Many studies also show the importance of the relationship between schools and problems of harassment, violent incidents, gangs, and illegal drugs among children (Zhang, Musu-Gillette & Oudekerk, 2016). Previous studies have also recognized harsh disciplinary practices and conventional forms of school policing that make students feel voiceless and vulnerable to violations of their rights and dignity as contributing to the development of
criminal behavior in children (Shedd, 2015).

Two factors contributed to the local rehabilitation program’s failure to implement academic and vocational training in the community rehabilitation program. The first factor related to the assessment carried out to identify the needs of children. No evaluation was conducted to review its contents and assess the importance of education for its long-term positive impacts on child offenders. Evaluation is one of the main components of an effective rehabilitation program such as MST to identify the risks or needs of children involved in criminal activities. In other countries (i.e., Canada, Singapore, Netherlands), exercises were carried out using risk and need analysis tools such as the Structured Assessment of Youth Violence Risk (SAVR), the Early Assessment Risk List (EARL), the Youth Level Service / Case Management Inventory (YLS / CMI), the RISC (Recidivism Assessment Scales) and the Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) (Wingerden, Wilsen & Moeings, 2014). The assessment of needs is essential to identify the needs of children and contribute to the inclusive content of the rehabilitation program, which includes education and vocational training.

The second factor relates to the system of child justice in Malaysia, which appears to be unprepared to cooperate with other community social agents. This study’s findings have shown that the local rehabilitation program has not been able to foster active and sustainable collaboration between multiple macro system agents. It includes family, school staff, and other social sectors in the community. The involvement of these microsystem agents is minimal and voluntary. There was absolutely no activity involving the school or community throughout the child’s enrolment in the rehabilitation program. For example, MST emphasizes the roles of the therapist and counselors in assisting clients with rehabilitation activities. MST therapist works to enhance the family/caregivers’ parenting skills (e.g., monitoring, supervision, affective relations) and then leverage these improvements in family functioning to facilitate critical changes in other extra familial networks (Henggeler, 2012, Lux, 2016). Each therapist within the team works with four to six families, providing intensive home- and community-based services for 3 to 5 months. Although the duration of MST treatment is relatively brief, the intervention process is intensive and often involves 60 h or more of direct contact between the therapist and family. As there are no clear guidelines on how to execute the MST-based rehabilitation program, practitioners (i.e., probation officers and counselors) of the juvenile justice agencies in Malaysia work independently without assistance from any social sectors to rehabilitate children. As a result, they are subject to burnout, heavy workload, insufficient resources, and lack of time to properly carry out the rehabilitation program (Ministry of Women, Family, and Community Development & UNICEF, 2013; Aishah, 2016).

In response to this issue, the paper calls for a collaboration between all microsystems agents to rehabilitate child offenders. This community mobilization initiative consists of volunteers, voluntary organizations, local institutions, and other community resources to make a useful contribution to the rehabilitation of the child offender in a community setting. These community agents act as “assistants” to the child justice system to manage the child/family throughout the rehabilitation process. This paper cites an active community mobilization initiative in Thailand involving several non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to provide care and assistance to their child offenders undergoing community-based rehabilitation. The Thai Government is developing a variety of community-based services to help children undergo community rehabilitation. It includes educational assistance and family services, such as family support and parenting. The Thai judicial system believes that the effectiveness or success of the treatment and rehabilitation of child offenders in the community depends on community members’ positive thinking and involvement in the rehabilitation program (Ratanadilok, 2015). The initiative is consistent with the provisions of the Beijing Rules Convention, which emphasizes that community-based rehabilitation or non-institutional treatment should include assistance from the community to promote children’s well-being. This effort aims to ensure that children undergoing community rehabilitation are given self-development opportunities, including opportunities for education or vocational training, employment, and any other assistance (The Beijing Rules, 1985).

The study also found that schools were reluctant to cooperate with probation officers in securing children’s disciplinary reports, as well as in the process of preparing a probation report to protect their reputation. The findings are consistent with the previous study’s findings, which reported the school’s refusal to cooperate with the juvenile justice system to maintain its reputation and goodwill (Aishah, 2016). The involvement of children in criminal activities would inevitably impact the reputation and achievement of a school. Efforts to return children to school are therefore not natural. Members of a society may see school as a failure to educate children. Apart from that, most children in the criminal justice system have been suspended from school, as they have always shown weak academic performance (Farr & Adams, 2016). These factors contributed to the school’s reluctance to receive them as students, despite their interest in continuing schooling.

One of the strategies implemented by MST is to promote participation between parents/guardians and schools. This initiative’s main objective is to counter misbehavior at school and then ensure that children remain in school or prevent punishments such as school suspension and expulsion. Studies (i.e., Bower, 2017; Martinez, 2015) have consistently shown that parental involvement in school activities has contributed to the reduction of criminal or delinquent behavior among children and, as a result, has had a positive impact on their educational development.

6. Implication for practice

School intervention is a viable and workable strategy through the Parent-Teacher Associations (PTA), a voluntary organization established in every school and made up of teachers, parents, law enforcement (police), and the local community. In the local context, the role of PTA is being implemented by the Malaysia Education Act 1996. The objectives of the PTA include the establishment of a platform for student welfare and school advancement forums and services to enhance the image of the school, to enable parents and teachers to exchange views and relevant information on education issues, and to provide opportunities for parents and teachers to discuss and negotiate efforts to improve the education of their children. PTA is a crucial platform for fostering a parent-school relationship that allows them to work together or discuss strategies to solve their educational performance problems. It is a negotiating platform to solve problems and then develop strategies to help children. The researchers also see this as a win–win situation for both parents and the school. It ensures the school’s welfare from criminal activities involving children, while parents benefit from having their children continue to attend school.

In other countries, this practice is known as the Restorative School Conference (Byer, 2016), based on the restorative justice approach. It effectively helps child offenders stay in school, reducing conflict-resolution misbehavior, improving students’ sense of connection to the school community, and enhancing the legitimacy of school authorities (Calhoun, 2013; Hirschfield, 2018). This program’s implementation begins when children, teachers, and parents come together or sit down to discuss strategies to solve children’s problems. It can be seen as a negotiation to repair the damage and make plans to encourage behavioral change in children. Affected parties, such as schools, have the opportunity to express the effects and harm caused by children’s actions (Calhoun, 2013). The medium allows children to express their views on their welfare needs. At the end of the discussion, an agreement is reached and settled, with a consensus among all the parties.

Apart from that, the school should accept children in the rehabilitation system attending school after the concept of “reparation” and “reconciliation” supported by the restorative justice system. This practice can facilitate the re-establishment of the relationship between
teachers and children and, as a result, improve their academic performance in preparation for their future (Fernandez-Suarez, Herrero, Perez, Basterretxea & Rodriguez-Diaz, 2016). The restorative approach sees the act of punishment or retaliation (such as expulsion and suspension of school sessions/terms) as an ineffective approach to rehabilitation and improvement of children.

The study also found that all the children who participated in this study who were not in school preferred to work rather than take part in vocational programs or stay in school. According to the Malaysia Child (Probation Hostel) Regulation, 2017 and Child (Approved School) Regulation 2017, a child offender ordered to go through an institutional-based rehabilitation has to access her/his educational right. Rule number 4(1) (d) of the Child (Probation Hostel) Regulation 2017 had provided the principal of the rehabilitation institution with the responsibility of ensuring the children’s access to their education right; as well as their needs to social and life skills and vocational training. Also, Rule number 20(2) Child (Approved School) Regulation 2017, and Rule number 10(2) Child (Probation Hostel) Regulation 2017 explicitly made it clear the importance of providing special tuition classes, education facilities, and transportation assistant for children offenders to attend schools. Nonetheless, for child offenders who undergo a community-based rehabilitation, Section 93(1)(c) of the Child Act 2001 - the Court For Children shall, in addition to exercising any of the powers provided for in subsection 91(1), order the parent or guardian of the child to execute a bond for the child’s good behavior if the child is in an educational institution, that the parent or guardian shall consult with the child’s teacher and principal once a month for the duration of the bond. This section implies the responsibility of the parents/guardians of the child offenders to ensure their continuous access to education in any educational institutions, including vocational training institutions.

Without a certificate or equivalent qualification, experience, and social capital, these children are at risk of having long-term life difficulties in the future. Education plays a significant role in facilitating moral, social, and psychological development and has important implications for children’s long-term experiences and well-being, including employment, income, and health (Farn & Adams, 2016; Sheehan, 2016). Since all children had no opportunity to obtain alternative education, this adversity indirectly hindered their development in vocational training. The MST approach recommends that any rehabilitation programs for young people be integrated into the General Education Development (GED) program. It is a community college diploma course/program that offers various vocational training programs (Mühlhausen & Hurwitz, 2019; Mantey & Dzetor, 2018). It is essential because it establishes strategies (such as encouraging the acquisition of skills or professional certification) for children interested in work. It should also develop a family support system for children, such as monitoring, providing essential resources such as financial and transport, emotional support, incentives, and rewards for every positive change that has been made. It should be remembered that the main objective of rehabilitation or treatment of the child offender is to reduce the rate of recidivism, prevent community impact and develop the future of the child (Hillege et al., 2017).

Children undergoing a community-based rehabilitation program must be encouraged to continue their education or participate in any vocational training program. For example, they may be encouraged to attend or participate in an alternative school or an alternative education program. All these schools are aligned with the state curriculum in academic fields (Daws, 2018). Alternative schools or alternative education programs have been designed to help at-risk students complete high school. It helps to address the needs of children who have struggled or cannot meet the conventional system of schooling or education (Sheehanr, 2016; Development Services Group, 2019). For the context of Malaysia, children who are given protection and are undergoing rehabilitation at institutions either Sekolah Tunas Bakti (approved school) or Probation Hostel are still allowed to participate in the learning process just like other children, whether in academia, religion, and morality as well as vocational skills (Department of Social Welfare Malaysia, 2019b). The vocational program includes automotive, carpentry, welding, electrical, housekeeping program, agriculture training program, carwash, and event management (Sekolah Tunas Bakti, 2020). These vocational training programs conducted at the children’s institutions are designed following the Malaysia Skills Certificate (SKM) coordinated by the Department of Skills Development (JPK) of Malaysia. Every teaching and learning module was developed following the National Occupational Skills Standard (Sekolah Tunas Bakti, 2020). However, for children who undergo the community-based rehabilitation order, they have to rely upon their parents initiative to help them to enroll in the vocational training program offered by various vocational training institutions, such as automotive technology, marine technology, mechanical technology, civil technology, electrics technology, electronic technology, hospitality, textile technology, photography technology, information technology, sports technology and oil and gas offered by the Youth Skill Development Division Ministry of Youth and Sports Training Institution (Ministry of Youth and Sports, Malaysia, 2020).

In the context of juvenile justice, alternative schools are commonly used as crime prevention and reduction curricula, where students at risk of school failure or withdrawal for various reasons are drawn from traditional public schools and introduced into more intimate educational settings that can be more accommodating and supportive (Denton & Connor, 2017). Recent research findings have shown that most children in alternative schools complete school education (Sheehan, 2016; Neve, 2017). The alternative school provides three main advantages for the positive influence of children. The first is to provide a supportive environment. Several studies have shown that the relationship building and development of a caring atmosphere in alternative education programs has positively impacted student success. It is because teachers have encouraged learners to see themselves as capable rather than unintelligent (Nakkula, 2013), teachers are sensitive to student needs (Barstow & Feldman, 2013) and strong teacher-student relationships, and positive behavioral interventions (Edgar-Smith & Palmer, 2015).

Flexible programming is the second advantage of an alternative school. This approach has been able to successfully meet the unique needs of the students who attended the school. Third, individualization. In order to ensure a low teacher-to-student ratio, the classroom capacity was limited to ten students. This condition allowed students to learn freely and receive individualized attention (Sheehan, 2016; Edgar-Smith & Palmer, 2015).

7. Conclusion

Whether in the form of academic or vocational training, education is one of the most vital interventions to rehabilitate children involved in criminal offenses. It is due to its role as one of the agents of socialization or agent of child behavioral reformation, which subsequently encourages the child’s future development. Child offenders undergoing community rehabilitation must continue their education or participate in skills or vocational training. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) referred to in Article 29 clearly emphasized the importance of education—where a child has the right to education. However, this study has shown that the community-based rehabilitation intervention in Malaysia is still ill-equipped to comply with the provisions recommended by the CRC, in particular for child offenders currently undergoing community rehabilitation. This study’s findings have shown that the MST component that aimed to encourage children’s academic and vocational needs was also overlooked. In response to the findings of this study, the researcher suggested several initiatives that could be considered by the local rehabilitation agencies to improve the existing rehabilitation program further. Although this study was conducted on a small scale and involved only nine child offenders who undergo their community-based rehabilitation order, the study’s findings may
promote awareness and encourage the existing child justice system to earnestly implement the community-based rehabilitation following the MST framework that puts a strong emphasis on education and vocational training for children.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Siti Balqis Mohd Azam: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Software, Visualization, Writing - original draft, Writing - review & editing. Siti Hajar Abu Bakar: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Software, Supervision, Validation, Visualization, Writing - original draft, Writing - review & editing. Jal Zabdi Mohd Yusoff: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Supervision, Validation, Visualization, Writing - original draft, Writing - review & editing. Siti Hajar Abdul Rauf: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Visualization, Writing - original draft, Writing - review & editing.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Acknowledgement

This work was supported by the Institute of Research Management and Services, Universiti Malaya (grant number RP033-16HNE)

References

