Teaching and Learning Problems of the Orang Asli Education: Students' Perspective

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Abstract

The standard of education among the *Orang Asli* people as an indigenous ethnic in Malaysia is still at a low level. The majority of the *Orang Asli* people receive formal education only at the primary level. However, there is a significant trend where the majority of students who completed their primary education will drop out from secondary school. Hence, only two percent have been successful in advancing their higher education in tertiary institutions. Such problems are commonly associated with several factors, including students' attitudes, awareness among parents about education, local culture, school leadership, school environment, and problems related to the teaching and learning process. For better understanding of this problem, a specific research was carried out to study the *Orang Asli* students in Kelantan. The research focused on students' perspectives based on the questions: What are the teaching and learning methods often used by teachers? What are the common problems related to the teaching and learning of the *Orang Asli* students? What are students' perceptions toward the teaching and learning methods used? The research using qualitative methods involved four *Orang Asli* villages in the state of Kelantan. Data were collected through interviews, focus group discussion and observation. The respondents consisted of children and young adults. Results showed that teaching pedagogy are generally stereotyped and unable to stimulate students' interest. The common problem in the teaching and learning is related to the attitude and commitment of teachers in the teaching and learning process. The implications of the problems and teachers' attitudes are significantly associated with degrading interest among students on education, issues of attendance and students' academic performance.

Keywords: Orang Asli, indigenous education, teaching and learning of the indigenous, teaching-learning problems, Orang Asli Education

1. Introduction

Continuous efforts have been implemented to develop the *Orang Asli* people by the Malaysian government since independence in 1957. The recent total population of the *Orang Asli* people is nearly 180,000 and they have been introduced to various economic development and social development programs (Hj. Ali Abidin, 2008). The economic development programs primarily focus on land development for commercial crops such as rubber and oil palm. Other provisions including agricultural inputs, skills training, and provision of assistance to improve their socio-economic status. Apart from that, social development programs are focused on providing infrastructure facilities, housing, health and education (JAKOA, 2011; Ramle, 2011). In general, the goal of those development programs is to integrate the suburban *Orang Asli* community into mainstream society.

The development programs have somehow influenced changes in the lifestyle of the people. Successful implementation of economic development projects, especially the commercial crops projects have increased their incomes and improved their socio-economic status (Ramle, 2010). Hence, the poverty rate among the *Orang Asli* people has decreased from year to year. As at 2010, the poverty rate for household heads (KIR) of the Orang Asli was only around 32% (JAKOA, 2011). The poverty rate is indeed a considerable reduction when compared with the rate in the 1990s, which recorded more than 80% (Lim Hin Fui, 1997; Ramle, 2010).

Despite changes in their lifestyle from an economic standpoint, however, the educational level of the *Orang Asli* has not experienced dramatic changes. Based on examination performance at the primary and secondary school level, the accomplishments of the *Orang Asli* students were still far lagging behind in comparison to students from other ethnic groups in Malaysia. Hence, several identified factors are associated with the poor performance. The most common and obvious factors are local culture, geographical areas as they live in the forest settlements, the attitude of local leaders, support agencies and problems related with the teaching and learning process.

2. Background of the Problem

The Malaysian Government has given serious attention to improving the education level of the *Orang Asli* people. This responsibility is reflected through the development of a comprehensive education plan in each Five-Year Development Plan and the Long Term Development Plan of Malaysia (EPU / UNDP, 2011). Generally in every Five Year Plan, the government strategically planned to increase human resources through improving the education system and learning facilities including enhancement of teacher professionalism.

Education is also one of the National Key Results Areas (NKRA), which was launched in 2009. With regard to the NKRA, the Malaysian government targeted that by 2012, all students would acquire the basic reading and writing skills after three years of schooling (EPU / UNDP, 2011). By 2015, the Malaysian Government is targeting all children in this country to have at least primary education.

The *Orang Asli* children are not to be left behind in the focus of national educational development. Enormous efforts have been made since independence in 1957 up to now which aimed to improve the standard of formal education to those who live largely in rural areas. JAKOA is the development agent to execute the government's short-term and long-term development plans (Zainal Abidin Hj Ali, 2012). Among the programs are the introduction of specific strategies and incentives such as the Education Assistance Scheme, 2010 Educational Development Action Plan for the *Orang Asli* Community, Friendly Teaching Programs, motivational programs, Mini Hostels Program, as well as special awareness programs for the parents of *Orang Asli* students (JAKOA, 2011).

Despite the implementation of such efforts for the *Orang Asli* students, it is still a challenge to upgrade their standard of education which has yet to experience huge changes. The problem of school dropout is still high. The most serious and significant dropout cases occur during the transition from primary school to secondary school (Hasan Mat Nor, 1997). From 2005 to 2010, the number of dropout cases in secondary schools was triple compared to the actual enrolment in primary schools (JAKOA, 2011). In addition, the students' academic performance is still at a very low level. According to the *Orang Asli* Strategic Development Plan (JAKOA, 2011), the percentage of the *Orang Asli* students who passed the public examinations in primary and secondary schools was small. This significantly gives impact that only 880 of the *Orang Asli* students have completed their tertiary education between 1971 and 2010.

Previous researchers such as Hasan Mat Nor (1997), Razaq Ahmad et al. (2011), and Hood Salleh Abdullah, Ramle (2010) described that several factors relatively have certain impact on the students' education. The most significant problems are the state of poverty, communication, attitudes, social prejudice in context with relationship with the external community, the influence from dropout friends, teaching and learning facilities available in the school, their culture of not taking education as a serious matter, natural geography and marriage at a young age.

Apart from the abovementioned factors, instructional or pedagogical factors have also been described by researchers as other factors that create educational problems for the *Orang Asli* students. Razaq Ahmad et al. (2011) stated that students do not like fierce and strict teachers, in addition students are demotivated by the old streotype of teaching techniques. For example, students are quite fed up when teachers often take them to just watching TV (Astro) during a learning and teaching session in school. A study carried out by Aminuddin et al. (2012) has found the same indication. Students are actually eager and ready to learn when there is a new enrichment pedagogical approach such as 'edutainment'. Lessons should be delivered to students through the fun approach but appropriate to their needs. This aspect is studied in more detail by the writer and the findings are further discussed in this article.

3. Model and Methodology

This study is based on the GPILSEO education development model. According to Abdul Razaq et al. (2011), the GPILSEO model derived from the Te Kotahitanga model introduced to 33 secondary schools in New Zealand from 2004-2007 which aimed to develop a culturally responsive pedagogy. This model was first designed to improve the achievement of the Maori students based on an effective teaching concept. The model was

developed through strategic implementation and culture-conscious processes found in each Maori's tribe. Several aspects were taken into consideration which include interaction among participants, educational content and the pedagogical process. The Te Kotahitanga model was developed based on suggestions and opinions voiced out by the Maori students who conveyed their appropriate needs at school.

In addition, the Te Kotahitanga model has developed several GPILSEO elements for further reference (Bishop, 2010). These elements are the goals, pedagogy, institutions, leadership, the spread, evidence and ownership. The elements are described in Table 1.

Table 1. Elements of the GPILSEO educational development model

NO	ELEMENT	DESCRIPTION
1	Goals	Develop goals and visions of the school, as well as the objectives in developing students' educational performance.
2	Pedagogy	Development of a new pedagogy to change traditional educational practices and to improve achievement.
3	Institution	Develop an organizational structure or agents of change for the school to support students learning
4	Leadership	Creating a responsible, proactive and effective leadership.
5	Spread	Disseminate educational reforms to teachers, parents, community members and other agencies, and also provide insights for those parties to play their roles in improving the students' educational achievement.
6	Evidence	Develop and use appropriate measures to assess students' achievement as a way to improve teaching.
7	Ownership	Create opportunities for all to participate in educational reform and to let them understand what is happening.

Source: Russell Bishop et al. (2010)

However, this study solely focuses on the pedagogical element. In view of students' perspective, this element is said to have a significant correlation with students' achievement progress.

This study was done for three (3) months, from August to October 2011. The subjects of the study were people from the *Temiar* tribe in Gua Musang, Kelantan, focusing on two tribal settlements, namely Pos Pasik and Pos Blau. Both settlements were selected because they have a primary school and other related facilities, including hostels.

The data were collected from the respondents who are studying at the primary and secondary schools. The data were collected through interviews, which were done individually and in groups (focus group discussions), observation and document analysis. The data were collected through various techniques to provide a better picture of the pattern and to clarify the issues studied. Process analysis was based on the following procedures: (i) review and data refinement (ii) data organisation based on pre-set themes, and (iii) data coding.The data analysis process is chronologically shown in the following figure.

Figure 1. The process of data analysis

4. Findings

Many negative comments from various education stakeholders have been made regarding the *Orang Asli* students. The most common comments are low self-esteem, lack of interest in school, not doing their revision, introvert, and having difficulty mixing with other races in the school. There is also an impression that the *Orang Asli* students are slow learners with learning difficulties and dyslexia (Juli Edo, 2012; Suhaimi Safari, 2012).

Such comments certainly do not reflect the overall attitudes of the students in recent decades. A study carried out by Abdul Razaq Ahmad et al. (2011) found that some of the *Orang Asli s*tudents do have a positive outlook on education and they do think that education is important in their lives and for their families. Some students also put extra efforts to be at par with the other students of different races. These students realize that education is the only means for them to plan and build a better future.

Another study on students of the *Temiar* tribes also concluded similar findings. The students generally have a positive outlook on education. Most of them have high interest in education and aspired to get a good career through education (Ramle bin Abdullah & Faridah binti Mat, 2012). Hence, in discussing educational problem of the *Temiar* students, it can be considered that there is no significant relation between academic achievement with their attitudes and interest. Instead, the problems should be viewed in a more comprehensive context and from various dimensions. One of these is the issue in teaching and learning or pedagogy used by teachers. Research on students' perception has found several significant indicators and described as follows:

1) Diverse and various teaching methods

Students generally prefer teachers who teach using various teaching methods. According to Abdul Razaq et al. (2011) students prefer teachers who love telling stories, using local language or language that is easily understood, asking questions, singing, provide educational games, joking, using computer, giving exercises, watching TV/Astro, play / games and a tour around the school.

However, results of the interviews indicate that problems are faced by the students in this context. Some students said their teachers did not encourage them, instead these teachers always looked down on their students, teachers were not caring and did not give enough attention to the students. Some students also said they were depressed during the lesson because the teachers always punished them.

Some other problems mentioned were related to the teaching methods. There are findings on the attitudes of teachers especially their integrity, for example their punctuality; some teachers often skipped the class and did not take their teaching duties seriously. These negative attitudes had negative impacts on students. Apart from that, there are also teachers who have high expectation on the *Orang Asli* students to easily adapt with the mainstream system. Hence, they focus on and use the same teaching approaches as those in the mainstream system. This approach is not in line with the views of the teaching and educational experts that teachers' teaching approach must be appropriate to the status, ability and students' level of thinking.

2) Relationship with teachers

The teaching and learning process will proceed smoothly and effectively through good relationships between teachers and students. According to Ishak Haron and Koh Boh Boon (1985), good teachers must know their students closely and have the attitude to teach and educate them so that students can develop their personality perfectly in all aspects -- cognitive, affective, and others.

The majority of teachers at the *Orang Asli* settlements are not locals but most of them do try to get closer with the local students and the villagers. It is good if the teachers are able to speak the *Temiar* language after several years of teaching in the village.

However, results of the interview show that a number of teachers have negative attitudes in the context of relationship with their students. There are teachers who are not willing to live in the *Orang Asli* villages because they find it difficult to adapt with the local people. They consider their students' lives and the living environment as so foreign. Consequently, the teachers do not really play their role in promoting the students to come to school

In the classroom, some teachers show discrimination against the *Orang Asli* students. Some teachers prefer to approach and give attention to good students and neglect the other unfortunate ones. Apart from that, not all students receive educational aid.

3) Language barrier

The teaching and learning process involves communication between teachers and students. Educators agree that teaching is not a one-way flow of knowledge from a teacher to students. It involves interactions between teachers and students, interaction with teaching materials and methods used to achieve the specified objectives (Ishak Haron & Koh Boh Boon, 1985). This opinion can be defined in a way that language is the means of communication and it is very important in the process of transferring knowledge (Salhah, featuring Abdullah & Mohd, 2007). Failure in communication will disrupt the learning process, lessons will be less effective and teachers will beunsuccessful in attracting students to follow their lessons.

Interviews with students revealed that some teachers are unsuccessful in establishing good communication during the teaching and learning process. Some of the students said they could not understand the lesson delivered by the teacher as they did not understand the language used. The majority of teachers are Malays who are unable to speak the *Temiar* language to deliver their lessons. This situation has caused a number of students, particularly students in level one (from year one to year three in primary education) to not understand what is being taught.

4) Teacher training

In recent years, the Ministry of Education has seriously focused on teachers'needs especially those in the rural areas, including in the *Orang Asli* schools. Most teachers are well trained who have received formal training at the teaching colleges. Nevertheless, some teachers confessed that they were unable to fully use their skills. The implication is students consider some teachers do not know how to teach, so they find school is not fun and lose interest in learning.

5) Management of extra learning activities

Learning activities beyond the school hours were acknowledged by students as one of the activities that can improve their achievement in education. However, the approach taken by the school was considered as not appropriate with the local culture and geographical environment. For example, extra classes were held by the school at night. This activity is deemed crucial, but it is considered not suitable with the dark environment asstudents who live far away from the school are unable to come. In addition, it is difficult for parents to send their children to school at night.

5. Conclusion

This study found several significant issues of teaching and learning. One of the issues is teachers' role in the process. Keep in mind that the main task of a teacher is facilitating student learning. To fulfill this task, teachers must know how to create a condition conducive to achieving their learning objectives (Ishak Haron & Koh Boh Boon, 1985). In other words, teachers should create conducive conditions to motivate students and promote their interest to learn in order to achieve the optimal level of achievement.

Descriptions on the relevant findings of previous studies show that the *Orang Asli* students have a relatively low educational achievement due to significant problems related to teaching and learning methods. Without denying the problems on the part of students' self-learning ability and other problems, it can be concluded that the students did perceive teaching problems in various domains as the aforementioned. Those problems deflate students' interest in learning and thus affect the quality of their academic achievement. This situation is clearly illustrated in the following Figure 2:
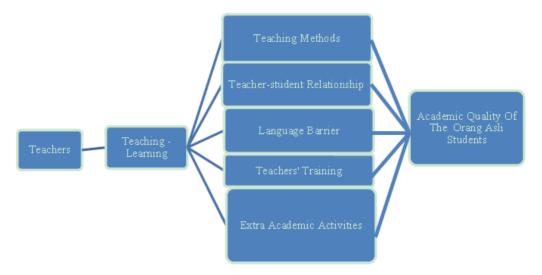
Figure 2. Students' perspectives on the teaching-learning problems

In conclusion, several efforts to improve the teaching and learning process need to be taken seriously in the hope of enhancing the academic quality ofthe *Orang Asli* students. Various problems in teaching such as teaching methods, social relationship with students and language barrier, need to be solved so that the learning process can be implemented effectively. In addition, improvement and prompt actions to address those areas including issues related to teachers' skills and academic activities will motivate students to be more interested in their education.

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