

An Evaluation on the Best Practices of Human Rights in Malaysian Schools

**Jane Teng Yan Fang
Chang Lee Hoon**

Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris

Abstract

The study investigated the schools' experiences on SUHAKAM's (Suruhanjaya Hak Asasi Manusia Malaysia) best practices in Human Rights ATHAM (Amalan Terbaik Hak Asasi Manusia) programme. The aim of the best practices on Human Rights in schools is to create and practice a culture of human rights in schools. With the cooperation of the Ministry of Education, five schools were selected as the pilot project. The study focused on the evaluation into the aspects of challenges, ways to overcome challenges, benefits and the future plans for the programme. The study employed a mixed-method design in soliciting qualitative and quantitative data. This paper focuses on the evaluation using the qualitative method. The findings show that the challenges faced by the schools in practicing the Human Rights program are lack of knowledge; inadequate skills; and lack of community support. The results also inform that the ways to overcoming the challenges are establishing a common practice for all; integrating Human Rights in subjects and implementing ATHAM (Amalan Terbaik Hak Asasi Manusia) through various projects. Nevertheless, the results indicated that the schools had benefited from the program. The advantages are new knowledge gained; awareness and responsibilities at all levels towards the practice of Human Rights at schools. This study informs and motivates the various stakeholders to promote the implementation of Human Rights in the schools context.

Key words *Human Rights, best practices, experience, challenges, implementation.*

INTRODUCTION

The World Programme for Human Rights Education, established by United Nations with the cooperation of United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), seeks to promote a common understanding of the basic principles and methodologies of human rights education, to provide a concrete framework for action and to strengthen partnerships and cooperation from the international level down to the grassroots.

The First Phase of the Plan of Action of the above-mentioned programme (2005-2007) focuses on key actions that are to be undertaken by the ministries of education and other relevant agencies working in partnership to integrate human rights education

effectively in the school system, nationally. (Plan of Action World Programme for Human Rights Education, First Phase, 2006). The Plan of Action was adopted by all Member States of the United Nations General Assembly on 14th July 2005. The Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM) states that Malaysia, being a Member State, has the responsibility to implement the Action Plan (SUHAKAM, 2009).

SUHAKAM (*Suruhanjaya Hak Asasi Manusia Malaysia*), established under the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia Act 1999 (Act 597), has undertaken among its other functions, “to promote awareness of and provide education in relation to human rights” (Section 4(1)). To fulfil its function in human rights education, Education Working Group was set up and one of its working committee is the Sub-Committee of Human Rights Education in School (KEPHAMUS) (*Pendidikan Hak Asasi Manusia di Sekolah*) which comprised of three nominations by Ministry of Education (School Division, Curriculum Development Centre and Teacher Education Division), three academicians from public universities and three representatives from non-governmental agencies. Since its inception, SUHAKAM under the Education Working Group, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education has completed several human rights education and Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) programmes such as conducting conferences, symposium, seminars and workshops for education officers, teachers, students and non-government organisations as well as disseminating materials on UDHR (The Universal Declaration of Human Rights) and CRC.

In 2009, the Human Rights Education in School committee under the Education Working Group, SUHAKAM proposed to undertake a holistic programme on Best Practices on Human Rights in Schools, known as ATHAM (*Amalan Terbaik Hak Asasi Manusia*) (SUHAKAM, 2009).

Five schools were selected for the first phase of ATHAM (*Amalan Terbaik Hak Asasi Manusia*). It was projected that another five schools would participate in the programme in the second phase when the schools in the first phase have undergone the experiences of the programme and would subsequently act as a model to other schools. The study aimed to evaluate the schools’ experiences on SUHAKAM’s Best Practices in Human Rights (ATHAM) at the five pilot schools in Malaysia. The evaluation focused on the areas of the challenges, overcoming challenges, benefits, and future plans of the pilot schools on the ATHAM programme. The evaluation yielded insights on how far human rights were being practised amongst teachers and students. Thus, it provides guidelines for other schools to adopt the ATHAM programme.

HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION IN MALAYSIAN SCHOOLS

Malaysia ratified the CRC (Convention on the Rights of the Child) in 1995 to uphold its commitment to the protection and welfare of her children. This was a major step for the country. Malaysia submitted its first report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2006, and in return the Committee recognised the Government’s serious attempts to comply with the CRC - especially through the enactment of the Child Act in 2001. Human rights education cannot be reduced to the simple introduction of human rights content. It brings about a profound reform of education, which touches upon the curriculum, in-service and pre-service training, textbooks, methodology, classroom

management, and the organization of the education system at all levels. This is especially important in a multicultural society like Malaysia:

In Malaysian schools, the programmes that are related to human rights can be divided into two parts which are curriculum and co-curriculum. Curriculum can be defined as all the courses of study or subjects offered by an educational institution. It may include any educational experience. Malaysia has a 6-3-2-2 system of education, comprising six years of primary education, three and two years of lower and upper secondary education, followed by two years of post-secondary education. HRE (Human Rights Education) in the co-curriculum refers to all activities outside the classroom offered to students in the form of clubs or societies, sports and games, and uniformed units. As a result of their experiences and learning which occurs both in and out of the classroom, they would develop into responsible individuals with a more defined identity and global view of the world.

Curriculum

Generally, the education system provides the best mechanism to integrate and combine human rights values all over the world. The main or best practices in the school curriculum can be seen through the Moral Education, Islamic Education, and Civics and Citizenship Education (CCE) subjects. The Moral Education subject is a compulsory core subject for all non-Muslim students and Muslim students are required to take the Islamic Education subject. The core of the Moral Education syllabus is the 36 moral values. These values include faith, responsibility, and open-mindedness among others. The 36 values are categorized into seven major learning areas of study. These are self-development, family, environment, patriotism, human rights, peace and harmony. By learning all these values, the Ministry of Education hope to develop responsible individuals who are equipped with values that are acceptable to Malaysian society and aligned to universal values. The CCE subject is a compulsory subject for all students. The core of CCE is to educate students on their rights with responsibilities, multiculturalism, and harmonious living in Malaysia's plural society.

Co-Curriculum

Co-curricular activities are compulsory at the upper primary and secondary levels, where all students must participate in at least two activities, of which one must be sports-related. Co-curricular activities are often categorised under the following: Uniformed Groups, Performing Arts, Clubs & Societies, and Sports & Games. These activities provide opportunities for students to develop their interest, talent and aptitude outside the classroom. Students may also participate in more than two co-curricular activities. Competitions, special projects, and programmes are organised by schools such as Sports Day, Co-curriculum Day, Quran Reading Competition, Career Day, and Anti-Smoking Campaigns.

The Role of SUHAKAM in Education

The Human Rights Commission of Malaysia is widely known by its acronym “SUHAKAM” (*Suruhanjaya Hak Asasi Manusia Malaysia*). It was established in 1999 by an Act of Parliament, the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia Act. Under this Act SUHAKAM is assigned ‘to promote awareness of and provide education in relation to human rights’. For this purpose the Human Rights Education and Promotion Working Group has been formed with the following objectives:

1. to promote respect for and protection of human rights through educational activities for all members of society;
2. to assess needs and formulate strategies for the furtherance of human rights education;
3. to foster learning environments that encourage participation and development of a caring personality that upholds the dignity of human beings and values friendship, understanding, tolerance and equality.
4. to collaborate with government agencies, non-governmental organizations and civil society in the implementation of human rights education programmes.

In line with the objectives of the implementation of ATHAM (*Amalan Terbaik Hak Asasi Manusia*) where there is a need to assess the programme to provide feedback in order to further recommend the programme to be carried out at more schools. Therefore, it was timely and apt to evaluate the best practices of human rights implementation at five selected schools under the collaboration of SUHAKAM and the Ministry of Education Malaysia.

METHODS AND SAMPLE

The study employed a mixed-method design in soliciting qualitative and quantitative data. The first phase consisted of the collection and analysis of qualitative data. The qualitative results were obtained from interviews with 103 respondents. They comprised of school administrators (five principals and four senior assistants), five ATHAM programme coordinators, 21 teachers and 28 students who were involved in the planning and implementing of the ATHAM programme, and 18 teachers and 22 students who were not involved in the planning and implementing of the ATHAM programme.

In this context, the data obtained from all the five schools were collectively analysed to uncover common themes and sub-themes on the school experiences with the ATHAM programme.

Respondents in the First Phase of the Study

In the first phase of the study, upon the permission and approval from the school, the respondents were interviewed between July – November 2010. The respondents were selected, with the assistance of each school’s ATHAM programme coordinator.

Upon informed consent from the respondents and pupils' parents, interviews with the respondents were conducted as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Number of Participating Schools and Respondents

	Name of School	Number of Respondents						Total number of respondents
		School Administrators	ATHAM coordinator	Teacher involved in ATHAM participants	Teachers not involved in ATHAM	Pupils involved in ATHAM	Pupils not involved in ATHAM	
1	School A	2	1	5	2	5	5	20
2	School B	1	1	2	5	6	5	20
3	School C	2	1	6	5	8	4	26
4	School D	2	1	5	3	5	4	20
5	School E	2	1	3	3	4	4	17

In total, 103 respondents were interviewed, 20 respondents each from School A, School B and School D, 26 respondents from School C and 17 respondents from School E. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with the school administrators, ATHAM coordinators and school discipline teachers whilst focused interviews were conducted with other teachers and pupils. In sum, the respondents consisted of five school principals, four senior assistants, five ATHAM coordinators, 21 teachers who were involved in planning and implementation of the ATHAM programme, 18 teachers who were not involved in planning and implementation of the ATHAM programme, 28 pupils who were involved in the planning and implementation of the ATHAM programme at schools, and 22 pupils who were not directly involved in the planning of activities in the ATHAM programme.

For the purpose of confidentiality, and adhering to the ethics on research, the actual names of the schools and respondents were not used in this paper. The schools were labelled as School A, B, C, D and E. The respondents were identified according to the six sub-groups, namely administrator (principal and senior assistant), coordinator (teacher appointed by the school administrator to coordinate the ATHAM programme), teachers involved, and not involved in the planning and implementation of the programme, students involved and not involved in the planning and implementation of the programme. The findings are presented in the following section.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results on the evaluation of the implementation of school experiences with the ATHAM programme by the five participating schools are presented and discussed in this section. The evaluation was carried out based on the five areas below:

1. What are some of the challenges towards Human Rights?
2. How did ATHAM help the school overcome these challenges?
3. How are the benefits of ATHAM in the school?
4. What are the future plans for ATHAM?

The Challenges towards Human Rights

Human rights in the school context are either taught through subject content or students are being provided experience of human rights by the school education system. School A, C, D and E revealed some of the challenges faced towards promoting human rights as in the following sub-themes:

1. Lack of knowledge of human rights;
2. Inadequate skills to promote human rights;
3. Lack of support from the community.

Lack of Knowledge of Human Rights

The administrators, teachers and students at the five selected schools provided the views that human rights are important. However, the administrators face constraints in implementing the ATHAM programme as the school community such as the administrators, teachers and students seemed to lack knowledge of human rights. More often than not, they found themselves handicapped, as a teacher who was directly involved in the programme from school C expressed in excerpt 1.

Excerpt 1:

The knowledge about human rights is still limited, among students and among teachers; what right are we talking? People's rights, women's rights, children's rights?

Due to the lack of knowledge, teachers and students could not interpret the meaning of human rights effectively, thus their mis-conceptualization hinder their understanding towards the underlying meaning of the programme. Therefore, they were discouraged to participate in the programme. The teacher in School A who was involved in the ATHAM programme stated her feelings as shown in excerpt 2.

Excerpt 2:

Sometimes children misunderstood about the program from SUHAKAM. Even though they are wrong, they asked the teacher why they are punished. They abused the human rights principle.

For School A in particular, the administrators stated that due to the discipline problems and the large enrolment of the school, it had stifled some knowledge of human rights to be explored at the school level as the Principal explained, "probably in an aspect of the students' discipline...as the school enrolment is too huge..." (Principal School A).

Inadequate Skills to Promote Human Rights

In general, all the schools' administrators revealed that they lacked skills in promoting human rights, implementing the activities of the ATHAM programme in their existing school projects, and also in the teaching and learning process. The following statement by a teacher from School C says in the excerpt below.

Excerpt 3:

I always go inside the class. I always discussed with my student what are the wrong things and the good things. They always think that they are right. So, they still don't understand what are Human Rights? Sometimes, they can't accept why the teacher takes action and punished them.

Most specifically, a majority of the teachers at the selected schools admitted that the lack of skills had hindered them from gaining cooperation from all levels of community to enhance the implementation of ATHAM. From the experience of a teacher from School C, it was found that when handling a case amongst the students, human rights became controversial and somehow contradicted with the decision taken to solve the problems, as explained by a teacher who was not involved in the ATHAM programme at School D in excerpt 4.

Excerpt 4:

The discipline teacher is worried about the school rules and the discipline process, which seems to get more difficult. He says he is stressed with the students. They will not admit that they are wrong even though they are really wrong. He has to prove that they violated a school rule. So, as a discipline teacher, he has to work more on that and sometimes, he missed his class because of this. Similarly, the counsellor talks about abuse of human rights.

Lack of Support from the Community

To enable the ATHAM programme to run well at each level, all administrators at the selected schools agreed that the support from the community, whether the teachers, students or parents are of utmost importance. The teachers involved at schools A, B and D revealed that no parents had been involved in the project. A teacher from School D went on to say that, "The school seems to have no idea how to involve the parents or address problems related to family background, which can be very serious." On the other hand, an administrator at school B admitted that it was difficult to get the support from students themselves as a teacher at School B states in the excerpt.

Excerpt 5:

This issue is difficult here. We want to carry out, but the students' attitude - couldn't be bothered. Students do not want to give cooperation. So, that is a challenge to the teachers to implement it.

At the students' level, it was found that the implementation of special ATHAM activities could not sustain success as some of the students refused to cooperate as one of the students at School C who was involved elaborated, "we are lack of time; we can't support the program as it is carried out as a special project." (Student Involved at School C).

Overcoming Challenges

As highlighted earlier, the teachers and students especially the coordinators of the ATHAM programme at the five selected schools faced various challenges in implementing human rights in the school. ATHAM has been introduced by SUHAKAM to 'create and practice a culture of human rights in school responsibly for continual social harmony and living' (SUHAKAM, 2009). The qualitative findings revealed that to overcome some of the challenges at this juncture, they ways to overcome could be summarised as suggested ways by the administrators and teachers. The ways of overcoming the challenges are:

1. Establishing a common practice for all;
2. Integrating human rights in subjects.

Establish a Common Practice for All

In order to overcome the challenges, the respondents were asked on the experience and views of ways to overcome those challenges. One of the teachers at School B who was not involved shared his observation in excerpt 6.

Excerpt 6:

We need to have a more effective system. That's the reason the implement this ATHAM, because it is best practices...not necessary to be academic base... more on values...personality...one of the way to develop better individual from the discipline aspect...

The administrators at School E suggested that some initial understanding on human rights should be shared by the community of each school. And, a Senior Assistant at the same school says, "We need to have a roundtable discussion. We have to discuss what schools need to do and how to go about it and where" (Senior Assistant at School E).

It was revealed from the evaluation conducted at this stage that human rights seemed to be a relatively new matter at the selected schools, so to minimize the issue of implementation, the administrators and their community need to find ways to integrate human rights practices into the curriculum. Indeed, human rights can be practised within a common ground based on the setting of each school.

Integrating Human Rights in Subjects

Due to the lack of knowledge amongst the school stakeholders and school community, the administrators at School D and School E suggested that human rights be promoted

through integrating the knowledge in various subjects. A teacher involved at School E explained in excerpt 7.

Excerpt 7:

I feel for information, there should not be any problems. They knew besides from the books. In Civics and Citizenship Education and Moral education, we do have. Students understood. It is their own character? They lack understanding. The bottom line is students need to know what to do if their rights are not observed. Because they have no link with the outside agents...

Another administrator at the same school felt that ATHAM would be more effective if the school stakeholders focus on co-curriculum activities as said by a coordinator of ATHAM at School C, “We can improve about the participation of the program, for example, through activities outside the classrooms”.

Implementing the ATHAM Programme

The administrators at the five selected schools revealed that apart from attending the workshops organised by SUHAKAM, SUHAKAM officers, and SUHAKAM High Commissioners were helpful. Besides that, the members of SUHAKAM Human Rights Education in School committee had also visited their schools to assist them in planning, executing and monitoring the ATHAM programme. Generally, it was found that the ATHAM project was implemented in the schools through:

1. special activities
2. integrating ATHAM elements/perspectives into the existing curriculum, co-curriculum and school culture.

Special Activities

The administrators at the five selected schools had adopted different ways and methods to integrate the ATHAM activities into their existing school programmes. Special activities were conducted such as:

1. reading/explaining the human rights (CRC) articles;
2. quizzes and essay competition;
3. discussions;
4. Speeches during weekly school assembly and co-curriculum day;
5. Mural painting ;
6. School radio programme.

Teachers and students at School A and School C further enhanced the human rights activities by having a Pondok ATHAM (*Hut of ATHAM*) and a Laluan ATHAM (*Pathway of ATHAM*) so as to exhibit information and activities on human rights conducted in the schools. School C displayed information on human rights along the

school corridor and had special bulletin boards. It was pointed out by the administrators and ATHAM coordinators at School C that information on the ATHAM programme were not locked up in a room, but displayed outside (in an unlocked open area), that would be easily accessible for all the teachers and students. The Senior Assistant and the Coordinator at School C felt that to reach out to the community, the outlook of the information on the programme should be attractive in appearance and informative in content. It was gathered that teachers at School D and School E carried out quizzes and explanation on human rights during assembly and through their school radio system to impart knowledge of human rights to the school community.

Integrating ATHAM into Existing Curriculum, Co-Curriculum, Discipline and Environment

It was found that the practices of human rights were implemented in the co-curriculum activities. There were varieties of clubs, societies, sports and games, as well as uniformed units to cater for students' interests and talent from diverse multi-ethnic background. All students were given the right to participate in co-curriculum activities of their choice and preference.

In addition, it was reported by School C that they conducted a co-curriculum carnival based on the following principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC):

1. No discrimination
2. Implementing rights
3. Child's opinion
4. Freedom to form association
5. Recreational activities

Furthermore, at School C, a special room was assigned for the students to develop their talent and interest in music and dance. According to the principal, a "pop band" was formed for those students who were interested to play the guitar and drums. The administrators at this particular school provided the students with the musical instruments, including traditional Chinese classical instruments. The students at this school were allowed to practice after school hours. The students were also allowed to practice their traditional dances in the specially assigned room. The Principal said that by giving the students the opportunity to develop their musical talent, the students who "usually play truant" were encouraged to attend school so that they could play the instruments after school hours. At the co-curriculum carnival day, the students performed their traditional dances as well as music.

It was found that ATHAM activities were integrated into co-curricular programmes, "Merdeka" activities (activities related to Malaysia's independence), games and sports activities after PMR examination, and *senamrobik* (aerobic exercises with music). At School C, the teachers felt that the involvement of all races in school activities were very encouraging. As a point of illustration, the active involvement of students was demonstrated through election campaigns such as watchdog, and a special human rights banner was shown as recalled by a student at School C in the following excerpt.

Excerpt 8:

SUHAKAM told us if possible to involve the students in decision-making. Election is not done by the teachers, but run by students and support staff of form six. Teachers are not involved, they only vote.

During the evaluation process, it was found that human rights were implemented in the enforcement of discipline in all the five selected schools by the administrators. According to the discipline teachers and student affairs Senior Assistants at School A, the enforcement of discipline was in line with the discipline guidelines stipulated by the Ministry of Education. Students were made aware of their rights and any disciplinary action was according to the set rules. As one discipline teacher in School E mentioned that there were cases where students inform the teachers of their rights, if they were punished and further added that ‘they know their rights’.

In addition, the researchers observed that there were practices of human rights in the school environment and management. For instance, the students at School A, C and D were provided with the right to information, right to counselling, as well as a clean and conducive learning environment. Bulletin boards were placed at various places, namely in and outside the office, counselling room, canteen and along the school corridor. Information on the bulletin boards included co-curricular activities, school achievements, and general information on current and social issues, such as dangers of drugs, smoking, and career opportunities. In all the counselling rooms, a friendly and conducive environment was set up, and signs stating ‘counselling session is in progress’ were displayed to ensure the privacy of counselling sessions.

Benefits of ATHAM

The qualitative analysis on the five schools indicated that the community at the five selected schools had benefited from the ATHAM programme and the advantages are discussed based on the three sub-themes:

1. Knowledge about human rights
2. Awareness and practice of rights
3. Awareness and practice of responsibilities

Knowledge about Human Rights

The administrators, teachers and students reported increased knowledge on human rights as a major benefit of the ATHAM programme. The acquisition of knowledge was easily checked through quizzes and the information on human rights at *Pondok* ATHAM and *Laluan* ATHAM. The students at School A, C, D and E stated that they received information on human rights through *Pondok* ATHAM and the *Laluan* ATHAM. The teachers and students at the five schools who were involved in ATHAM activities seemed to have benefited more than teachers and students who were not directly involved when the evaluation was carried out at the five selected schools. The teachers at the five schools pointed out that they learned more about the importance

of human rights when they participated in ATHAM activities, for example, one of the teachers at School C explained as in excerpt 9.

Excerpt 9:

ATHAM program helps because students had some background knowledge about the rights through the Civics. So, this program added to their knowledge. If it is connected to their existing learning subjects, it is more meaningful. The knowledge will remain in their mind.

However, awareness, practice, and change in behaviour were more difficult to measure. A teacher at School A noted that, 'to observe changes through actions is not easy, as our emotions is difficult to be measured.' In this context, a teacher at School A stated that she focused on knowledge about human rights, for example regarding the rights of the child and especially the right to education. She believes this is a better way to help to promote human rights at schools in general.

Awareness and Practice of Rights

The community at the five selected schools felt that the ATHAM programme had benefited the students as they had shown greater awareness of human rights. A student at School A shared the experience in excerpt 10.

Excerpt 10:

Having learnt through ATHAM, only then we know what is SUHAKAM: It is an agent to protect human rights especially children' human rights!

It was also found that students at the five selected schools were well aware that they had the rights to get an education whilst the teachers, as workers, had the right to have a break or rest. In sum, fundamentally after knowing their rights, the students spoke out and requests were made.

Awareness and Practice of Responsibilities

The findings indicated that teachers and students at the five schools had benefited from the ATHAM programme as students showed awareness of their rights and responsibilities as said by a student at School E, 'we are the next generation...' The students also felt that human rights could protect them from bullies and solve discipline problems as said by a teacher at the same school, 'Teachers integrate values into their teaching'. In addition, teachers who were not involved in the ATHAM programme at the same school stated that the programme helped students 'to read the newspapers'.

According to the administrators at School A, C D and E, ATHAM provided space for students to improve creativity, practice and mastery of leadership and 'power management'. For example, the administrators at School C pointed out that in their election programme, they provided opportunities for students to lead. The administrators at the two schools mentioned further that if students were noisy in the

classroom, they had to accept the punishment because they had violated the human rights of other students.

The teachers and students at School B raised concerns that human rights in school were being ‘abused by students to lengthen or complicate the discipline processes’. Nonetheless, positive views on the benefits of ATHAM seemed to be more dominant as it was expressed by the teachers at School B that students were now more aware of the rights of others and their responsibilities towards them and subsequently resulting in more harmonious relationships and less discipline cases at the schools.

The results indicated a win-win situation in which the teachers at the five selected schools gave more rights to students, for example in terms of participation and practicing ‘two-way communication’ as expressed by the administrators in the schools. On the other hand, the administrators expected the students to become more responsible and engage less in anti-social behaviours like bullying, vandalism and other problematic behaviours. The administrators indicated that the practice of human rights by all members of the school would ensure no discrimination as the principal at School A said in the excerpt below.

Excerpt 11:

No discrimination between races. Between excellent and weak students;
“everyone has their own abilities. ATHAM can give them more confidence.

Future Plans on the ATHAM Programme

The administrators and teachers at all the five selected schools expressed interest in further implementing the ATHAM programme in the future. The teachers at all the schools gave some suggestions on how they would continue with the programme and at the same time expressed their concerns and challenges as categorized under the three sub-themes:

1. Continue with ATHAM project;
2. Involvement from SUHAKAM or special agencies;
3. Future challenges.

Continue with ATHAM Programme

The administrators at the five selected schools generally gave positive views that they wanted to continue with the ATHAM programme in the future and a Senior Assistant at School C and the coordinators at School A and E suggested ways in improving the programme. From their experiences with the ATHAM programme, the coordinators felt it was a good programme because the community had the opportunity to give exposure of information about human rights. The administrators at School A and School C were of the view that it was important for ATHAM to be continued as the teachers who are not directly involved in School B explained in excerpt 12 and excerpt 13.

Excerpt 12:

If given the opportunity, we would like to continue with the program. It is a serious matter. We will do our best as long given directive.

Excerpt 13:

Let it continue, it is benefiting all levels. Now, it is for Form 1, then should go to Form 5. If we stop, some would not be exposed to the human rights thing. It is better to continue...It should be continued.

Involvement from SUHAKAM or Special Agencies

Although the administrators at the five selected schools gave positive feedback, some teachers at the selected schools wanted SUHAKAM to carry out activities related to ATHAM in their schools. One of the teachers at School A put forward her view which would make the implementation of the ATHAM programme more effective. Her reason is shown in excerpt 14.

Excerpt 14:

Implementation is good and it should be continued. If possible, the body that imposed this has to come down to the field. They did the programme at schools. Don't just let the schools do it. If the organizer came to the school, it will be more effective. It is appropriate but all schools must take part.

There were also teachers who were not involved directly in the ATHAM programme at the selected schools who said that it was SUHAKAM's responsibility to do the ATHAM programme as one of the teachers at School B expressed her view in the following excerpt.

Excerpt 15:

If it is a SUHAKAM's project, they should come down to the field. Do something at the school. Not we do them.

In addition, the teachers at School B and E indicated that the ATHAM implementation should be a collective responsibility between SUHAKAM and the school, 'let's SUHAKAM go down to the field, we can organize but do it together' (A teacher at School B).

Future Challenges

To continue with the ATHAM programme, the teachers at School B and E felt it was necessary for SUHAKAM to initiate some work in providing information, activities and any other matters related to ATHAM so as to enable the schools' community to adopt the activities as suggested by one of the teachers at School B. Her suggestion is shown in excerpt 16.

Excerpt 16:

SUHAKAM should provide teachers with some exposing on the issue of human rights. Share with teachers the activities that can be used...

The administrators at the five selected schools admitted the benefits of ATHAM at this stage of the evaluation. They suggested other schools should be given the opportunity to implement the project so that all schools in Malaysia would know about human rights. Furthermore, with the evaluation carried out, the feedback would help the administrators to participate in the ATHAM program more voluntarily and implement it at schools more effectively. In sum, it was found that the program had benefited schools being evaluated. It was speculated that the implementation of human rights in education would benefit more for the community at the rural schools. Thus, every effort has to be made to introduce human rights practices at schools in the rural area during the second phase of the project.

DISCUSSION

With the acceptance of ATHAM as a school programme, the school stakeholders (administrators, teachers and students) revealed that they intended to improve the human rights conditions in the following areas: education and learning system, students' discipline, school environment and knowledge in human rights. The right to learn, including children from poor and low-income group, right to religion, multi-racial classroom, and the integration among the multi-racial community in schools were some of the human rights conditions that the schools wanted to improve.

The results also showed that the challenges faced by the schools towards promoting human rights were mainly in three areas, namely lack of knowledge of human rights, inadequate skills to promote human rights and lack of support from the community. The administrators faced constraints in terms of ways of imparting them. The teachers felt there was a lack of sources to rely on. Nevertheless, it was observed that schools which participated in the ATHAM project have initiated interesting activities in gaining the respect and interest of the stakeholders to promote human rights through their school activities.

In overcoming the challenges in the implementation of the ATHAM programme, the participants in the interviews suggested that a special ATHAM unit be set up by the state education department or district education office. They felt that it was important for schools to share their experiences and understanding on human rights which should be practised in all aspects, not only academically but also in students' behaviour and discipline.

Under the ATHAM programme, the schools conducted interesting and creative special activities or projects to promote best practices on human rights in school with the support of SUHAKAM's education officers and members of SUHAKAM's sub-working committee on human rights education for schools. The special activities were found to be aligned to several articles in UDHR and CRC. For instance, UDHR Article 19 and CRC Article 13 (freedom of expression) were articulated through quizzes, speeches by students, discussions between school principal and students (*Program*

Suria Pagi dan Permata Hati), students' participation in the running of elections of prefects; CRC Article 15 (freedom of association) and Article 31 (right to leisure, recreation and cultural activities) were articulated in co-curriculum carnival, facilities for musical and cultural activities, and Prefects' Dinner and Convention organised by the prefects themselves; UDHR Article 3 (right to live in the freedom and safety from harm) and CRC Article 28 (the right to an education which prepares him/her for an active, responsible life as an adult in a free society which respect others and the environment) as articulated in enforcement of discipline as stipulated in the Ministry of Education Guidelines on School Discipline; CRC Article 17 (right to information) was disseminated through school radio, setting up of *Pondok ATHAM*, *Laluan ATHAM*, and bulletin boards in open and accessible areas to all. These specific ATHAM activities had, in more ways than one, increased the awareness amongst the students, and positive implications on improving best practices of human rights in school through active involvement of the different stakeholders in the school.

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that the evaluation on the five participating schools in SUHAKAM's best practices on human rights in schools or ATHAM programme has indicated that the implementation by these five selected schools are aligned with the intended objectives of the ATHAM programme. The school administrators, namely principals, senior assistants, ATHAM coordinators, teachers and students who were involved in planning and implementing the programme faced the challenges but at the same time they were able to find ways to overcome those challenges. Nevertheless, the ATHAM program has been found to have benefited the selected schools. All stakeholders at these five selected schools were encouraged to promote the implementation of human rights in schools. Moreover, the study implied that there is a need to formulate strategies based on the evaluation so that human rights in education can further be expanded to all Malaysian schools.

Authors' note

The study was funded by SUHAKAM and a collaboration project between SUHAKAM and UPSI. We gratefully acknowledge the insightful comments provided by the working committee of this project of SUHAKAM. In addition, we acknowledged the significant contributions of the other co-researchers who are Dr Stefan Bucher, Mrs. Nurhuda bt Basiran, Mrs. Nafisah Ilham Hussin and Ms. Siti Norainizahhafizah bt Boyman.

REFERENCES

- Hak Asasi Kanak-Kanak*. Retrieved from <http://www.scribd.com/doc/38141443/Hak-Asasi-Kanak-Kanak> on December 15, 2010.
- Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). *World Programme for Human Rights Education (2005-ongoing)*. Retrieved July 15, 2009, from <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/education/training/programme.htm>

- Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). *Human Rights Education and National Curriculum*. Retrieved from http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/education/training/docs/replies/AUSTRALIA_30March2010.pdf July 24, 2011.
- OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). (2009). *Human Rights Education in the School Systems of Europe, Central Asia and North America: A Compendium of Good Practice*. Warsaw, Poland: OSCE/ODIHR. Online (main part only). Retrieved from <http://tandis.odihr.pl/documents/hre-compendium/> 30 July, 2011.
- Osler, A. and Starkey, H. (1996). *Teacher Education and Human Rights*. London: David Fulton.
- Suruhanjaya Hak Asasi Manusia Malaysia, SUHAKAM. (2009). Kertas Konsep Amalan Terbaik Hak Asasi Manusia di Sekolah.
- Suruhanjaya Hak Asasi Manusia Malaysia, SUHAKAM. Human Rights Lesson Plan for Southeast Asian Schools.
- Suruhanjaya Hak Asasi Manusia Malaysia, SUHAKAM. (2006). *Research on knowledge and practice of human rights in secondary schools*. Kuala Lumpur
- Suruhanjaya Hak Asasi Manusia Malaysia SUHAKAM. (2005). *Report of the Roundtable Discussion Convention On The Rights Of The Child*. Kuala Lumpur: Author. Retrieved July 31, 2011, from http://www.suhakam.org.my/conf_forum_wshop_report.
- Suruhanjaya Hak Asasi Manusia Malaysia (SUHAKAM) (n.d.). *Report on Access to Education in Malaysia*. Kuala Lumpur: Author. Retrieved July 31, 2011, from http://www.suhakam.org.my/conf_forum_wshop_report.
- Suruhanjaya Hak Asasi Manusia Malaysia (SUHAKAM) (n.d.) Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Retrieved from <http://www.suhakam.org.my> on July 31, 2011.
- Suruhanjaya Hak Asasi Manusia Malaysia (SUHAKAM) (n.d.) UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Retrieved July 31, 2011, from <http://www.suhakam.org.my>
- Tibbetts, F. (2002). Emerging models for human rights education. In: *Issues of Democracy: An Electronic Journal of the U.S. Department of State*. Volume 7, Number 1, March 2002.
- United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) (2006). Plan of Action World Programme for Human Rights Education First Phase. New York & Geneva.
- United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). Human Rights Education. Retrieved from <http://www.unesco.org/en/human-rights-education/> on July 15, 2009,