

## ATTRACTING INDIGENOUS PUPILS TO SCHOOL: A CASE STUDY IN PERAK, MALAYSIA

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### Abstract

This study aimed to identify and determine the factors that can attract the 'Orang Asli' or the indigenous pupils to overcome school absence. Case study method was carried out in two schools of Orang Asli located in Tapah, Perak. Data source was obtained from two headmasters as respondents in this study. Data were collected through interviews, observations and document analysis. Each respondent was asked the same questions in the form of semi-structured protocol interview. Overall, the findings showed that among the factors that influenced the school attendance of Orang Asli pupils were the teachers' attitudes, adequate food distribution and provision of incentives to parents and pupils. To increase the percentage of Orang Asli attendance, cooperation between the administration and parents are very important and necessary to ensure their children attend class and catch up with the school teaching and learning. Accordingly, this study hopes to provide guidance to all stakeholders concerned in order to raise awareness about the importance of education among Orang Asli pupils and raise their percentage of attendance in school .

**Keywords**      *Education, attendance, attitude, incentives, Orang Asli, Orang Asli, Malaysia.*

### INTRODUCTION

Orang Asli students' school absenteeism is often a major problem, especially for schools consisting of Orang Asli children in Peninsular Malaysia. The existence of these problems is caused by the school environment, society, poverty and lack of families and teachers encouragement to excel Orang Asli education that contributes to dropouts in primary and secondary schools (Joshi, 2010). This has led the Orang Asli pupils to be left behind in the process of teaching and learning. Looking at the percentage of Orang Asli pupils passing the exam, it is found that the percentage is very far behind and can be categorized as low-achievers (Mohd Fauzi, 2006). Therefore, Curriculum Development Centre (CPC) has been providing Integrated Curriculum for Orang Asli Pupils and Penan in 2007. One of the objectives is to attract and encourage the Orang Asli pupils to attend school. Study by Norwaliza (2014) shows that the average attendance record of Orang Asli pupils is in the range of 60 to 70 percent. This finding is also supported by a study conducted by Ramle and Faridah (2012) stating that it is very unusual to record the Orang Asli pupils attendance in primary school to

surpass 70 percent. Hence, to improve Orang Asli student interest in education and reduce the dropout rate, there are school administrators who had change the concept of 3M to 6M as the addition to the lessons outside the classroom and play (*main*), improve the Supplementary Food Program (*makan*) and music and cultural activities (*muzik*), other than reading (*membaca*), writing (*menulis*) and calculating (*mengira*). In this way, more Orang Asli pupils love their school, get them close to the lessons and nurture them to realize and understand the importance of education.

## **OBJECTIVE**

This study was conducted to identify factors that influence the presence of Orang Asli pupils and what attracts them to go to school. This study can also give ideas and improvement to the school administrator to increase the percentage of school attendance among the Orang Asli pupils.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The data was collected through case survey research design. Respondents were selected by using purposive sampling. Semi-structured interviews involving two Headmasters from schools of Orang Asli pupils. Interviews were conducted based on the prepared protocol. The sample selection was conducted by using purposive sampling method to obtain the required information. According to Wiersma (2000), purposive sampling method can be used when the purpose of the study is to focus on a particular group. In addition, data are collected through observation and documents analysis in schools that have been identified.

### **Research Area**

Selection of study design makes it easy for researchers to identify the research area (Burns 2000; Jane & Lewis 2003). This statement was also supported by Marohaini (2008) that said data collection should be done in an easy area to access, not complex and able to obtain permission. Two schools that were involved as the reasearch area enrolled one hundred percent of Orang Asli pupils. In this study both schools encoded as SKPM school and SKPT school. SKPM school is categorized as *Sekolah Kurang Murid* (SKM) and classified as *Pedalaman 2*. There are 12 male teachers and an administrative assistant. Female teachers are not recruited due to the safety risk when commuting to the school. SKPT school is categorized as *Sekolah Kurang Murid* (SKM) and classified as *Pedalaman 2*. The school has 53 Orang Asli pupils from year one to six. All 12 teachers are male and one administrative assistant. There is a quarters for teachers but only used at certain times. There is a computer lab with 20 computers but difficult to get access to the Internet. The school also has no telephone line and the only communication is via radio. Diesel Genset is used for their electricity supply. Other facilities include water supply and a refrigerator for storage of food stocks.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study showed that there are three main factors that affect Orang Asli student attendance to school. These factors include factors of: i) the attitude of the headmasters, ii) the distribution of food in schools and, iii) the provision of incentives.

### *The Attitude of The Headmaster*

Based on the findings from the interviews with both teachers at the schools, it is found that both headmasters adopt friendly attitudes and love to mingle with locals regardless of their age. Along the way to school, the school headmaster of SKPM that was driving the 4WD will stop for a while when approached with the Orang Asli communities and chatted with them. When we arrived at the Orang Asli settlements, the Headmasters even make a stop to have a talk with the mothers by asking them about their children's schooling. The friendly attitude of the headmaster is proven as he can even be recognized by a 3 years-old Orang Asli kid. This shows that the attitude of school headmaster plays a very important role to ensure the Orang Asli parents feel valued and this may create a catalyst for them to send their children to school. School administrators can effectively guide individuals and groups and institutions (Lindahl, 2007). In addition, the headmaster of SKPM also introduced the concept of "*Hol Nu Sekolah Mesti Hi Belajar*" which means "Come to School Must Learn". This motto is also seen displayed in each classroom so that it can be appreciated by every student. Pupils are also imbued with a feeling of wanting to always come to the school and instil to the pupils the importance of constantly learning with the speech of "*Selamat pagi cikgu. Datang sekolah mesti belajar*".

Other than taking care of the distribution of food, the headmaster is also very strict on cleanliness and neatness of his pupils who attend the school. The first thing he did was to make a grooming session in which he brought all the teachers and pupils to a nearby river and teach the pupils how to take a shower with soap and wash their hair with shampoo. Other than that, based on the researcher's observation, there are many mirrors hung on the walls of the school. This enables Orang Asli pupils to see themselves in the mirror. The headmaster also insists pupils to wear clean and tidy school uniforms and even to comb their hair if necessary. Other than that, the headmaster also stated that the administrators and teachers who are working in the schools enrolled by Orang Asli pupils should master the local language (Semai) by learning it from time to time.

### *The Food Distribution in Schools*

Both headmasters agreed that a consistent and quality food distribution may attract the Orang Asli pupils to attend school. The headmaster of SKPM school has introduced the concept of "*mong skolah mong cak*" which means 'if there is school, there will be food'. This means that if the Orang Asli pupils went to school they would get enough food. The headmaster also introduced the concept of 'One Day One Egg' to be given to the pupils. This is done in collaboration with the school cafeteria that provides food under the Supplementary Food Scheme (RMT) to ensure that children receive enough

food and also nutrition. It was also agreed by the headmaster of SKPT school which stated that the division of the food provided by the school is one of the main factors of the Orang Asli pupils to come to school. Studies by Norwaliza (2014) found that aside from the pupils interest or unwillingness to come to school is because of pressure from parents and teachers, Orang Asli pupils come to school just to get free food provided under the Supplementary Food Program (RMT) and schooling allowances granted at the beginning of the year. Once a month food rations are supplied by the contractor who was appointed by the JAKOA through tender system. School administrators such as the Headmasters will monitor this supply to ensure the provision of food rations are delivered as intended by the parties concerned. This is because there was an incident before where the responsible party had not sent sufficient supplies to the school. For example, the contractor irresponsibly ignored the order of 30 packs of rice as stated in invoice and only 8 packs were distributed to the school.

### ***Incentives Distribution***

Orang Asli pupils in Peninsular Malaysia are often having a lackluster of school attendance. To attract Orang Asli pupils to attend school is to give them incentives or rewards. It has been practiced by both headmasters of SKPM and SKPT schools. Among the incentives is to give surplus rations supplied by the parties concerned in the form of dry food and canned rice, sardines and chicken curry to be brought back to their homes if and only if the pupils gain good results in their studies. Other than that, the Headmaster also take the initiative to gather funds to take the parents and children who recorded 100% school attendance for a trip at the end of the year as he had taken them to Penang, Kuala Lumpur and many more places. Rewards like this can inspire parents to encourage their children to go to school. The effectiveness of this program has led the SKPM school to record 6 months of 100% student attendance in 2014 and 8 months of 100% attendance for the year 2015. This achievement is quite impossible to be done by other schools enrolled by Orang Asli pupils as their attendance normally are in the range of 60- 70% only (Norwaliza, 2014). Student attendance in school is one of the important elements that shows student achievement, i.e. how much time is spent by pupils in the school (Hattie, 2003).

### **SUMMARY**

To improve Orang Asli pupils attendance, a ‘sense of belonging’ or a sense of ownership and commitment of all stakeholders in Orang Asli pupils education need to be implemented. This sense of ownership will lead the pupils, parents of Orang Asli, teachers, administrators and everyone involved with education of Orang Asli pupils to feel more fun to go to school, reduce absenteeism and increase student achievement in education. It turns to the concept of a view of what ‘they’ want is more important than what ‘we’ want. If this concept can be sown and implemented, then the community will feel more appreciated and thus can give the commitment and cooperation in improving the educational attainment of their children in school. Aspects of integrated commitment among pupils, parents, teachers, school administrators, community leaders, the government, especially JAKOA, the private sector and NGOs are

desperately needed so that Orang Asli school pupils can be promoted as one of the mainstream school and be able to compete with pupils of other races. Studies by Norwaliza, Ramlee, and Abdul Razaq (2016) shows the support of various parties should be implemented to foster interest for Orang Asli pupils to attend school and at the same time increase their sense of ownership of the school. The program for the eradication of Orang Asli dropout should be carried out continuously and monitored from time to time so that the results can be seen and shared. It is hoped that with the integrated commitments, the challenges from MOE to reduce dropout rates among Orang Asli pupils around the country can be achieved, increasing the percentage of Orang Asli pupils in secondary schools and at the highest level in higher education institutions within and outside the country.

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