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Article in Middle East Journal of Scientific Research · August 2016

DOI: 10.5829/idosi.mejsr.2016.24.08.102130

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Parents' Roles on Educational Goals among the Orang Asli Community in Malaysia

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Abstract: This study aimed to explore the role of parents of aboriginal or Orang Asli in directing their children's education in Malaysia. The design of the case study was to ascertain the perspective of parents in improving the academic achievement of their children. Data source was obtained from two mothers and two fathers from the Orang Asli community as a research subjects in this study. The instruments used were a protocol interview and observation checklist. In-depth interviews were conducted to obtain detailed information. Observations in the home environment of the Orang Asli people were conducted to investigate the extent of the role of parents in their children's education. From the information analyzed, themes were identified and data triangulation technique was performed to determine the validity and reliability of the results. The findings showed that Orang Asli parents were found to have aspirations and goals in the direction of their children's education. It showed that the ratio goals among parents is very important in improving academic achievement, improving school attendance and helping to solve the problem of school dropouts. Accordingly, this study hopes to provide guidance to all stakeholders concerned in order to raise awareness about the importance of education among Orang Asli parents.

Key words: Orang Asli • Roles • Perspectives • Educational Goal • Malaysia

INTRODUCTION

Generally, parents of Orang Asli pupils and Orang Asli communities are still not interested in education but they view schools as a place to send their children to play and eat [1]. There are Orang Asli parents who are cynical about the role of education in changing their social mobility and are reluctant to accept the notion that formal education can help them improve their living conditions. This attitude stems from their previous negative experiences in school [2]. As a result, education is taken less seriously and this undermines any efforts to tackle the problem of school dropouts. Efforts to solve this problem will require cooperation from parents on an ongoing basis.

Continued efforts were made by the government to Orang Asli communities so they could be included in the mainstream education. Educating Orang Asli pupils,

however, should be emphasized since childhood so that they are more exposed to the process of teaching and learning. This matter is clear as to what has been advocated by UNESCO in the UNESCO's Division of Basic Early Childhood Education, which was introduced for children of indigenous people without losing their cultural identity [3]. It can also be done with a high level of awareness and support from the Orang Asli parents.

Orang Asli pupils' academic achievement in education is still too low compared with the other citizens of Malaysia [4]. This is because the number of Orang Asli pupils who drop out of school, particularly those transitioning from primary to secondary school remains high. In fact, the Department of Orang Asli Affairs (JAKOA) has found that the lack of involvement of Orang Asli pupils in both secondary and tertiary stems from factors that arised during primary school level [5]. This showed that this minority group is still far behind

and has high drop-out rates in all levels of education starting from preschool to higher education institutions [6]. Orang Asli dropout rates is higher among high school students than elementary school [7].

Orang Asli pupils who are less competent in cognitive (knowledge) area is caused by parents' education level which is low which further encourage them not to bother about the education of their children. Orang Asli pupils also find it difficult to understand what is being taught by the teacher, are forgetful, have lack interest in attending school and are easily discouraged, especially when they fail and lack motivation [8-10]. Orang Asli pupils were found to have an interest in outdoors activities but have problems in mastering skills. This has led pupils to have difficulty in capturing subjects that require problem solving, easily get bored and have no studying skills [8-11].

Other factors also contributed to the occurrence of dropouts and low academic achievements, namely the attitude of parents who were not concerned with their childrens' education. The attitude of parents who do not understand the importance of education causes children not to feel the need for higher education [12,13]. Orang Asli people, who are mostly not educated due to geographical remoteness have reinforced the idea that there are no benefits in sending their children to school [8]. It is not surprising if the Orang Asli people are often associated with low academic backgrounds [14].

Problem Statements: Attitude and role of parents are significant contributors to the increase in Orang Asli pupils dropout statistics. The involvement of parents in their children's education is key in determining the academic success of their children [15]. Policy makers, educators and scholars agreed that the partnership between families and schools can enrich the educational experience of pupils [16,17-19]. This also shows that besides continuous parental involvement, parents also have to set a goal for their children's education.

Previous studies have shown that pupils whose parents have a productive relationship with teachers, are likely be more successful in school compared to pupils whose parents are not productive [20]. This shows that the involvement of parents in the learning process of children in school is one of the aspects that should not be underestimated. Similarly, the relationship between parents and teachers also play a very important role in the academic success of students [21].

Previous studies demonstrated the importance of parents as a key component in children's learning. The discussion is focused on the positive relationship between parental involvement and pupils achievement. When parents reinforce what is learned by pupils in school, pupils will earn better grades, have higher attendance rates, able to complete their homework, show positive behavior, manage to finish school and more likely to continue their studies to a higher level. Students whose parents are diligent in attending various activities organized by the school and keep in touch with their child's teacher, have shown better academic achievement compared with children whose parents are less involved in school activities [22-24].

Research has proven that there is a need for collaboration between parents and teachers in educating pupils [20, 25]. Today, society has generally accepted that both parents and teachers share the responsibility in educating children [25] and this partnership is important in determining the success of students in school. However, the involvement and collaboration of community members is also important to ensure programs and school activities run smoothly. The school must set up programs and plan activities that take into account the attitude and sensitivity of parents and communities in order to create a learning experience that is easily understood by students [8]. In summary, based on the studies that have been conducted, it can be concluded that parents should have a specific goal in teaching children so the children can perform well in education. Good academic performance enables Orang Asli pupils to get good careers and it allows the level of socio-economic status of families to increase.

Conceptual Framework: The conceptual framework generates research problem, research questions, collecting and analyzing data as well as how to interpret the findings [26]. Thus, the conceptual framework is built based on the adaptation of the GPILSEO model of education for indigenous people (Maori) of New Zealand [27]. The conceptual framework is based on seven aspects (goal, pedagogy, institutions, leadership, spread, evidence and ownership). However, this study only focused on the aspects of their educational goals. Aspects in this goal were discussed from the perspective of Orang Asli parents on their children's education in terms of the goals of parents for a child's future and the actions taken to ensure the success of a child's education.

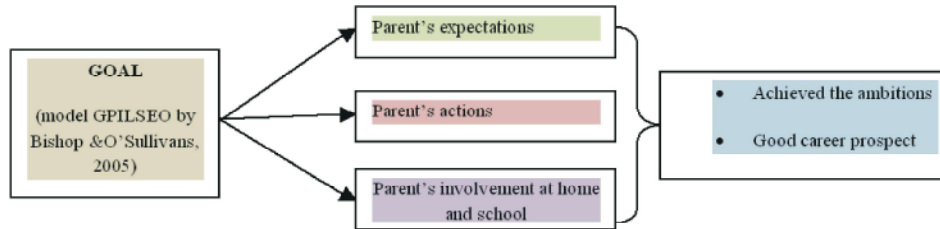


Fig. 1: Conceptual framework

Research Purpose: This study aimed to investigate the goals of education from the perspective of parents among Orang Asli people and the measures taken to fulfill those goals. The study also looked at the extent of the involvement of Orang Asli parents in matters of children's education in school.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted using case study. The case study was defined by Anderson [28] as “a holistic research method that uses multiple sources of evidence to analyze or evaluate a specific phenomenon or instance.” The design of this study was selected based on the desire to understand in depth [29] and to get a clearer picture concerning the goals and dissemination based on the views of Orang Asli parents. This case study is a form of research that aims to gather information and explain what is going on. Researchers are also trying to reach out or stay close to the surface of the data and events [30] and viewpoint of all study participants. Thus, this study involved in-depth face to face interviews with four participants aged 28 to 45 years old from a village of Orang Asli in Kuantan, Pahang. Since the process of understanding the perspective of the study participants is a complex process, the interview protocol [31] was used. It contains semi-structured questions. Hopefully this case study will provide a greater opportunity to understand and explore the complexities of various human experiences [32]. Selection of participants using the purposive sampling which is based on the assumption that researchers want to explore, learn and understand, so that the most respondents can be seen from them [31] and enhance the credibility of the findings [33]. A total of four study participants gave their consent to be interviewed for this research, two mothers and two fathers of Orang Asli people. The two mothers are housewives and the two fathers are a rubber tapper and self employed. Respectively, they are from the ethnic groups of Jah Hut and Semaq Beri.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study aiming to determine the goals of the parents was created based on the themes that have been identified. The findings for the determination of the goals aspect of education among Orang Asli students' parents can be summarized thematically: i) the desire of parents regarding the child's future, ii) the action parents take to see educational success of their children and iii) the involvement of parents in the school program.

Parents Expectations for Their Children's Future: Highlights of the study indicated that almost all respondents in this study aims to see their children succeed in education for their future in turn get good jobs. BA3 study participants gave the following explanation: “...I care about my children's education. My eldest daughter is studying in college in the course of pharmaceuticals. The second child in the college also. The third child had finished UPSR, fourth and fifth are still in primary school. If possible, I want my children to get good jobs later. Meanwhile, IB1 study participant wanted one of his children to become a teacher so that the child's future will be bright and lead a happier life than now. " I tell my child, she has to go to school and study hard so she can get a good job. If possible I want her to be a teacher. She will have bright future as a teacher".

Orang Asli parents' goals are made based on their observations and knowledge of the importance of education. Awareness of the importance of education exists when parents are often exposed to the knowledge about education when they attend programs organized by the schools. This was stated by the study participants BA3 as follows, "we are concerned about our children's education. That's why we always need to meet the teachers to discuss and when we are at home, we have to make sure he learns". Meanwhile parents who are not interested in their children's educations they have less knowledge about the importance of education for their

children. This is because they rarely get involved in school program and did not attend meetings with teachers about their children's progress. Clearly, Orang Asli parents should be exposed to information related to education and career direction so the parents are more motivated to ensure that their children get proper education after school. Orang Asli parents regard education as an element that allow their children to reach their career dreams. This research also showed consistent findings in confirming that the expectations and the goals of the parents are identified as one of the most important aspects in the educational attainment of their children [34, 35] and was supported by a statement saying there is a positive effect in the expectations and goals of parents especially in the culture of society in Asia [36].

Parents Actions for the Success of Their Child's Education:

The findings showed that Orang Asli parents also encourage their children in their studies by taking some actions. These includes in providing their need such as stationery, books, school uniforms and some pocket money. This shows the commitment of parents of Orang Asli students in improving their children's achievement in education. This was stated by the study participant BA3 as follows *"I buy whatever is necessary for her lessons if i have the money like clothes, pencils, workbooks and bags. If she wants to learn"*. The results showed that there are parents of Orang Asli students who are willing to sacrifice in providing their children with equipments as long as they want to learn regardless of the money that had to be spent for the purpose. There are also parents like IB1 who also monitor the progress of children's education at home by ensuring that their children complete their homework, *"every night I will ask my children if they have completed their homework or have you read the book yet?"*

But there are parents who cannot afford to give their children pocket money and depend on the school to provide food for their children. This was stated by the study participants IB2 as follows: *"If there is a lot, I will give a dollar. But sometimes he takes nothing. But I dont mind because his school do provide food to eat under RMT. These kids are not going to learn too much anyway. He is more interested in helping his father work at the farm"*. Such perceptions are closely linked to a number of factors such as parents' education levels and economic backgrounds that are low. A review on indigenous peoples also shows that parents are less positive about education [37].

The results also showed that one respondent BA4 had sent his children to boarding school, *"I have to send my children to the hostel because my house is quite far from the school. I do not like to be away from my son. But in the hostel, he can study better compared at home. His examination results are better since he started staying in a hostel because there is a learning schedule prepared and monitored by the teacher "*. This study showed that there are Orang Asli parents who send their children to boarding school because they believe their children will be more successful and achieve better educational achievement rather than being at home with their family. In the hostel, Orang Asli children are provided with food and drink and have study schedule set by the school. This shows that although Orang Asli parents do not know much about education their efforts in providing education for their children are applaudable.

Parental Involvement at Home and School:

When asked about the involvement of parents in their children's education at home, participant IB2 said he is not concerned about his children's education because he is not well educated and does not know how to teach his children at home. This was stated by the study participant IB2 as follows: *"... I am not highly educated. So I do not know how to teach my children at home. If he wants to learn it's okay but I also dont mind if he wants to work. I cannot force him..."* This statement indicates that there are also Orang Asli parents who do not bother about their children's education. They are seen to accept the educational process that is determined by the school as it is because of their faith in the administration. The parents also blame their poor educational background as they could not help their children with their homework at home.

However, there still are Orang Asli parents who said they would attend any programmes organized by the school if it can help their children improve academically. This was stated by the study participant BA3 as following: *"...If the school invites me I will go. I know the school is trying to do their best. So I will just follow"*. Here, the role of the school is very important in ensuring that all parents involved are present in every program so that the parents can gain a lot of insight in the importance of education. The school should also provide consultation and motivational programs for the parents so that their understanding in education is wider. According to Jeffrey [38] and Conway [39] parental involvement is highly correlated with children's reading skills, better

social development, better motor and adaptive skills and will have positive effect on the development of students education achievement.

Implications and Suggestions: According to Mustapha [40] there are Orang Asli parents who regard education as an element that allows their children to achieve the career that aspired them. His findings were consistent with studies that states a goals set by parents are identified as one of the most important aspects in the educational attainment of children [34, 35]. This statement was also supported by a statement saying there is a positive effect on expectations and goals of parents in the culture of the society in Asia [36]. However, this finding is quite different from previous studies which often portray that Orang Asli parents do not have clear educational goals and always have a negative perception of education.

However, this study also showed that some Orang Asli parents do not take seriously about the education of children and do not have clear goals about the direction of their children's education. A study conducted on Orang Asli parents showed that they have negative attitude regarding education [37]. Such perceptions are closely linked to a number of factors such as parents' education levels and low economic backgrounds. Orang Asli parents are seen to accept the education process totally as determined by the school because of their faith in the administration. Orang Asli parents also blame their low educational background and are unable to help their children with their homework at home. This view is consistent with the views of Osman [41] through a study conducted on indigenous Penan people in Sarawak where parents exhibited positive behaviors toward their children's education, but showed less interest in the learning process of their children.

Although there are hostel facilities provided to enable Orang Asli pupils to have access to education, there are also Orang Asli parents who do not like to send their children to boarding schools because their children do not want to be away from them. Indigenous people are known to have a tight bond with their family members. The problem of drop outs raised stems from one or a combination of several factors such as family ties are quite strong and children not wanting to live away from their families [8]. This is a heavy sacrifice done by Orang Asli parents [42]. The school management and teachers in schools with Orang Asli students need to have a more friendly attitude toward them. When the school management shows concern this leads to parents and

students feeling valued and their dignity is maintained. These concerns will create awareness among parents thus changing the perception of allowing their children to live in dorms. These efforts in turn can increase the level of accessibility of students to school [43].

In addition, the infrastructure of the hostel needs to be upgraded and equipped with facilities to attract more Orang Asli students to stay in the hostel [44]. Administrators of Orang Asli schools with residential facilities must work harder to convince Orang Asli parents to send their children to school. Based on observations, the hostel provided with all the necessary equipments are deemed to be good and comfortable. There might be lacking in infrastructure such as a library, but that is not a problem as there is a lack of interest in reading among Orang Asli students. But in terms of providing adequate food in the dining hall, the students are be given meals five times a day. Moreover, the Orang Asli schools that had been observed also held additional classes in the evenings for students who live in the hostel.

The Orang Asli children's lives depend on the role and goals of parents in determining their future. Childrens are like a piece of white cloth when they were born. So parents are responsible in painting the white. Parents are the best example, role model and a reference for children since young. Parents have clear goals and high expectations for their children's education in hope that they will produce children who are high achievers in education. The attitude of parents who do not understand the importance of education causes childrens do not feel the need for higher education [13].

Knollman and Wild [45] opinioned that parents can help improve this ability of children to complete assignments at home especially with in showing an interest in the task and see whether your child has finished the task. However, study found that Orang Asli parents are unable to help their children to do things that have been mentioned above. Among the reasons; they are too busy to find a food for a living, does not attach any importance to education and does not know how to help children complete their assignments. Indigenous peoples are mostly not educated due to their geographical remoteness which has reinforced the idea that there are no benefits in sending their children to school (8, 37). So it is not surprising that indigenous peoples setback are frequently associated with low academic [14].

However, not all parents of indigenous peoples ignore their children's education. There are Orang Asli parents who cares about their education achievement.

Although they do not know how to teach their children but they ensure that their children's need is set up and monitor the development from time to time. This finding showed that the involvement and the role of parents in monitoring their children's education would help their children completed the homework given on schedule, achieving good results in the examinations and monitor what they have learned in school.

It is recommended that Orang Asli parents should be given more exposure to the importance of having goals in determining the direction of education and their children's future. Research by Wahab *et al.* [47] showed that supports from various parties should be provided to enhance the Orang Asli students' interest to come to school especially to increase their sense of belonging and ownership. There is still an alarming rate of Orang Asli students who do not wish to study, plus the ignorance of their parents about the importance of education. Most Orang Asli students were found to have received less attention in terms of learning and this caused them to fail and eventually unable to complete their schooling. The psychologists agree that each individual has the potential to advance in all aspects of their lives if they are guided to perfection under the guidance of their parents [48].

CONCLUSIONS

According to Mazjub, [49], the leadership of parents in the educational process is very important in shaping children's self-concept. Self-concept is an overall perception of a person against himself either in the form of descriptive or cognitive assessment. One of the effects of self-concept is academic achievement. It is depending on the student's academic achievement of positive or negative response to a person's self-concept of studies. However, the study also found that Orang Asli communities pay less attention on the importance of self formation of their children. Observational data indicated that environmental conditions at home also stimulates less learning mood in their environment. This results in parents losing the opportunity to develop the potential of their children to a maximum. Thus the leadership of the parents at home is vital in helping to improve students' achievement. For this reason, the rise in educational intelligence of mothers with high education levels also tend to provide supporting conditions at home for their children [50].

Therefore, apart from the pupils' own efforts, parents and teachers should also enhance the students potential. The family should be seen as an essential part of the

development of the individual. Parent's academic qualifications also influence the self-disclosure of the children. This explains that highly educated parents are likely to have communication skills, more friendly and open than those with parents who lacks of education and still using traditional ways of communicating with the children. Thus, in this case the school needs to be more creative in attracting the parents to communicate more frequently with their child's teachers so that they can have a much clearer picture of their achievements. Orang Asli students who has the potential to continue their education to better schools like college and boarding schools should be given more attention by teachers and parents at home. This is because the boarding school were found to have produced a case of students who excel and thus be able to continue their studies to a higher level.

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