

Building a Framework for Language and Cultural Revitalisation: Lessons Learnt from the Bidayuh Indigenous Community in Sarawak, Malaysia



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Background of study:

Living in Sarawak, the Bidayuh indigenous community speaks the Bidayuh language. Past studies have demonstrated that many young Bidayuhs, particularly those living in urban areas, are presently shifting towards the more powerful and dominant languages. This situation leads to them growing up without speaking much Bidayuh and thus, they do not understand their culture.

Aim of study:

Based on the compilation of bottomup community led practices, this study aims to conceptualise a framework that is clear, direct, and practical to be employed for Bidayuh language and cultural revitalisation.

Data:

Past studies, documentary, mural, internet websites, FB and IG posts

Findings:

Society

Community

School

Audio-visual Bible lessons were recorded to teach Christianity in Bidayuh. A documentary was filmed and a mural was painted to showcase the unique tradition practised by the last ring ladies.

A wireless scheme was implemented in the Bidayuh villages so that the villagers were able to connect to internet. A Facebook group was created to practise Bidayuh and a music band was formed to perform in Bidayuh and traditional musical instruments.

A unified orthography for vowels was developed, several Bidayuh medium playschools/kindergartens were established, and Bidayuh was introduced in the formal education system.

Conclusion:

Some of the practices were faced with many challenges to the point that some community members have given up. Nevertheless, what should be remembered is that the use of Bidayuh exists beyond classroom setting; it plays a significant role in social and sustainability. The cultural is multigenerational process and may develop as time goes by with bigger and more ambitious goals.



Music band of Suk Binie'



The Last Ring Ladies, directed by Nova Goh



Dayang Hmuai Semban, drawn by Leonard Siaw