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ORANG ASLI STUDENTS' READINESS TO BE PART OF THE SUSTAINABLE EDUCATION COMMUNITY

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SUMMARY: The government of Malaysia has taken the responsibility to ensure that Orang Asli are not left behind in education. With the cultural shift in education and learning, the concept of 'sustainable education' requires educational policy to be revised and practices that are sustainable. This study is to investigate the Orang Asli of Royal Belum students' readiness to be part of the sustainable education community. Data was collected from a school at Royal Belum, Perak, through interviews, observations and questionnaire. The quantitative results show high self-belief, goals and awareness of the importance of education, more so for the Jahai tribe compared to Temiar. However, these are contradicting with teachers' and researchers' observations. Thus, intervention to translate their beliefs to actual performance is important for them and to the society to fulfill the nation's agenda and to be part of the global community of sustainable education.

Keywords— Goals, Orang Asli, Royal Belum, self-belief, sustainable education.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of 'sustainable education' is a cultural shift in the way we see education and learning. It implies systemic change in thinking and practice, essentially a new paradigm emerging around the poles of holism, systemic thinking, sustainability and complexity. This offers the possibility of education that is appropriate and responsive to the new systemic conditions of uncertainty and complexity that nurtures the increasingly important qualities of adaptability, creativity, self-reliance, hope and resilience in learners. Sustainable education implies four descriptors: educational policy and practice which is sustaining, tenable, healthy and durable.

Education is very important for people to be successful. Thus, the government of Malaysia has taken the responsibility to ensure that Orang Asli in Malaysia are not left behind in education. Among the initiatives and projects planned by the government is for the human capital development of Orang Asli, as stated in the Aboriginal Peoples Developments Strategic Plan 2011 – 2015 [1]. The government also builds school and hostels in several Orang Asli settlements such as in Pos Pasik and Pos Blau [2] to ensure that the Orang Asli children could attend the formal education provided by the government. Those who live far away from the school could stay in the hostels.

Many research have been conducted in relation to Orang Asli education which yields different results and conclusions. A study by Abdullah et. al.[2] on primary and secondary schools students of Temiar tribe in Gua Musang Kelantan in 2011, found that the Orang Asli students have low self-esteem, lack of interest in school, not doing their revision, introvert, and having difficulty mixing with other

aces in the school. In addition, other researchers claimed that the Orang Asli students are slow learners and have learning difficulties and dyslexia [5][6].

There are many factors that may contribute to the high dropout rate as well as low academic achievement among the Orang Asli students. A study on Orang Asli Temuan students from Jelebu found the following factors: socio-economic status of the family, home environment and parents attitudes, cultural influences and inappropriate educational policies in school [7]. Another study by Wong et. al.[8] on primary school students of Orang Asli community in Pos Senderut, Pahang, discovered the following factors: teaching and learning, lack of basic facilities and infrastructure, and role of parents.

In a study on Orang Asli Temiar, Abdullah et. al. [2] relate students' performance in education to teaching and learning (pedagogy) used by teachers. Based on students' perception, significant indicators of performance are:

1. Diverse and various teaching methods
2. Relationship with teachers
3. Management of extra learning activities
4. Teacher's attitude
5. Teacher training
6. Language barrier

However, the study shows that there is no significant relation between academic achievement with Temiar students' attitudes and interest.

Meanwhile, according to Ahmad et. al. [3] and Abdullah et. al. [4] some of the Orang Asli students have a positive viewpoint and high interest on education. They have the opinion that education is important in their lives and realize

that they and their families can have a better future through education [3] and aim to get a good career through education [4].

In view of the various conclusions from other researches, this study looks at Orang Asli students from the Jahai and Temiar tribes from several villages in the vicinity of a school in Royal Belum Perak. The objective is to investigate the students' readiness to be part of the sustainable education community.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study was carried out at a school in Royal Belum, Perak. Observations during a class activity with the students, questionnaire questions read aloud and interviews of the teachers and school principal were the data collection methods. The students are secondary 1 and 2 of the Orang Asli children, living in the hostel at the school compound. Gender of the participants: 53% female and 47% male students from a total of 55 between the ages of 13 and 14.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In general, challenges reported in other studies include the attitude and perceptions of the Orang Asli students towards education. 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 [2]. These comments were also derived at based on the interviews with the principal and teachers of the school, especially regarding Jahai students. Even at sports events among other groups of Orang Asli from other schools, Jahai participants are timid that they shy away.

However, results from other studies show that Orang Asli does have a positive outlook on education and they do think that education is important in their lives and for their families [3][4]. 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. In a research on Temiar students [2], it was reported that there is no significant relation between academic achievement with their attitudes and interest.

In our study, it was observed that the students have positive attitude towards learning. They were attentive in class, although, one third of these 13 and 14 year olds Jahai and Temiar students are unable to read. When asked verbally, the majority of them do not have other career ambition, except for becoming a policeman, soldier, and homemaker. Although they know teaching is a profession, none is interested in becoming a teacher. This may be due to their lack of exposure to the various other types of occupations outside their remote villages. One exception though, is a female student who wants to be a doctor.

Based on the analysis of 20 items in the questionnaire, Jahai students are found to score higher means in 13 items than the Temiar students, 2 items same score, and 5 other items showed the Temiar students scored higher. These items

represent three aspects of investigations, which are self-belief, having goals, and awareness on the importance of knowledge and education. The analysis shows Jahai has better self-belief, goals, and awareness of the importance of education than the Temiar. However, this results seem to contradict with the teacher's observation that Jahai are more timid than Temiar, with the perception that this is due to their physical appearance and status among the Orang Asli tribes.

The results indicated that the students at Royal Belum Forest perceived themselves as having self-belief, goals and realize the importance of education. However, from our observations, they need help to actually be so; to translate their beliefs to actual performance. This is important for them and the society, to fulfill the nation's agenda and be part of the global community of sustainable education.

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