Instilling Literacy Through Developmental Module Approach (DMA) Towards Orang Asli Pupils in Malaysia

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Abstract
Development of module has great impact on literacy today. This paper highlights the challenges and experiences of the researchers in an academic institution where the research project which initially began as part of an academic research initiative expanded to helping a marginalized community in need. This study gives researchers a wealth of information about the culture and mentality of Orang Asli pupils. What styles and methods of teaching and learning are suitable for them, especially in essay writing? As such there is a need for a method and module to design an appropriate pedagogy to improve literacy among these pupils. In this paper, we share the conception of instilling literacy by utilizing the Developmental Module Approach (DMA), an example of a systematic approach in improving literacy among a group of indigenous pupils specifically the Semai community from Terisu in Cameroon Highland, Pahang. The finding has provided important insights for the development of the pedagogical module and may offer a clear understanding of reasons Orang Asli pupils lag behind in their academic attainment. Based on the interviews we found that among the problems faced in the Malay Language literacy are closely related to cultural and environment issues and how such disparities affect drop-out rate among Orang Asli pupils. The study is expected to provide input to the curriculum development center, educational administrators and teachers.

Keywords: literacy, Orang asli, Semai tribe, Malay language; developmental module approach (DMA)

INTRODUCTION
I will begin this paper with some questions which I asked myself as an academician who is required to do research. What should I research on? To what extent, doing research, having grants and publishing scholarly articles in reputable journals dictate what needs to be researched? Is “contributing to new knowledge” a sufficient reason to embark on research? Being a researcher in the field of education and a minority among colleagues who are mainly from the Management fields, doing research in an area that is “not Management” is itself a challenge. University Utara Malaysia (UUM) is a management university offering undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in the Management disciplines. The education (social science courses) offered in this university are from the department I belong to, the School of Education and Modern Languages. The academicians in the Education Department are required to carry out research and publish scholarly articles on par with the other academicians in this university. Furthermore, a lecturer’s Key Performance Index (KPI) for research activities which contributes to career promotion and evaluation includes requirements such as securing at least one external grant, publishing at least two journal papers and presenting at least one conference paper per academic year. I believe it is difficult and challenging when the quality of the research carried out is determined by the number of journal papers published as an outcome of the research project and the amount of money secured from grants.

Our specialized area of research is on educational issues concerning the majority and minority population in Malaysia. The research project discussed in this paper can be classified as a project on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) which sees education as helping people “develop the attitudes, skills and knowledge to make informed decisions for the benefit of themselves and others, now and in the future, and to act upon these decisions” (UNESCO, 2010). We wanted to work on a project that emphasized the practical contribution of our research. As the Orang Asli is the most marginalized community in Malaysia, we believed that working on a research project with them would be valuable. It has been reported that a total of 147,412 Orang Asli live in Peninsular Malaysia (Ministry of Rural and Regional Development Malaysia, 2005). The Orang Asli remains as one of the poorest community in Malaysia due to poor educational performances (Nadchatram, I., 2009). Furthermore, our literature search indicated that there is very little written about education and the Orang Asli and these are either a one-off study or merely
reports which lack empirical data (Sidah, A., & Zami, M. F., 2008; Nicholas, C., 2009; Chupil, T., 2003). We were very fortunate that we work in the state of Pahang, which has the largest Orang Asli community in Malaysia. To begin, we managed to get a Fundamental Research Grant Scheme (FRGS) to pursue our research with an Orang Asli (Semai Tribe) elementary school in Terisu, Cameron Highland, Pahang. We felt happy to embark on a research area which was our area of interest.

Working with the Orang Asli school and interviewing the teachers, my colleague and I realized that very little is known about the Orang Asli pupils. Therefore, we knew that in order to understand the children’s experiences learning in the school, we needed to understand the practices of the community they come from. Thus, it was important for us to have access to the Orang Asli community. The objective of our study was to look at the literacy practices of teaching and learning Malay Languages of the Orang Asli children in school. After obtaining the necessary permission from the Ministry of Education (MOE), Pahang Department of Education (JPNP) and Jabatan Hal Ehwal Orang Asli (JHEOA), the Department of Indigenous Affairs in Malaysia, we managed to meet the Tok Penghulu (Head Village) of Terisu and through him; we managed to access and interviewed teachers in the school. Our initial research findings indicated that the children’s literacy practices in their homes are different. Literacy pedagogy has to be relevant to the needs of the students. A cultural responsive pedagogy has the potential to motivate students to read (Saedah Siraj, et al., 2005). Language literacy education, especially in the Malay Language as the main subjects taught in schools throughout the country should be strengthened further inline with its position as the official language and national language (Article 152 of the Federal Constitution).

In Malaysia, literacy development among vulnerable groups such as the Orang Asli children has often been a major concern. It has been noted that the literacy level and learning achievement among this group of children is low (UNICEF Malaysia, 2008). The illiteracy rate among the Orang Asli children is also a cause of major concern. Redzuan & Gill (2008) reported that the illiteracy rate among is group is 49.2% compared to 6.4% which is the illiteracy rate at the national level. There is an urgent need for improving literacy among this group and the present study focused on developing a pedagogical module to facilitate reading comprehension which responded to the needs as well as the context of the Semai pupils. Considering the experiences of Orang Asli pupils in formulating the definition can expand on and help to clarify the term, perhaps creating new approaches to addressing the needs of this population. From a practical perspective, in order for school administrators to set up viable intervention programs on literacy, it is necessary to gain some understanding of the population which one is dealing with, an understanding that goes beyond attendance records and test scores, into the lives of students and how the school fits into them.

The significance in this study is to provide the entire school community, as well as other teachers, and administrators, with insights into the perceptions of the varied causes of illiteracy. This study will explore the rich and untapped understanding of experiences of learning and schooling of Orang Asli pupils in a single research site. Despite the efforts of the Ministry of Education (MOE) to strengthen education, some pupils still lagged behind especially in the education of Orang Asli pupils. In Malaysia, the Orang Asli people are a minority of 0.5% of Malaysia's population. They can be divided into 18 tribes (Nicholas, 2000). Nicholas (2007) explained that if 100 Orang Asli pupils entering year one, only six pupils who will graduate up to grade five. 94% of them would not be detected either graduated or not. He added that the distinction between pedagogy and culture as a contributor to the existence of the problem. Our initial research findings indicated that the children’s literacy practices in their homes are different from what is expected of them in the school (Renganathan, S., & Chong, S. L., 2010). Some studies suggest that children’s experiences at home influence the types of skills they develop to succeed in formal learning environments (Wells, C. G, 1995; Heath, S. B., 1982). Teachers we interviewed informed us that they were reluctant to give homework or allow the children to take schoolbooks home because the children will most likely not bring the schoolbooks back. Furthermore, the teachers also believed that it is very likely that those books will be torn or lost.

So far, research on Orang Asli literacy in Malay language is very scarce and limited. Thus, this study aims to identify the key problems encountered in constructing sentence structure in Malay Language essay writing and reading comprehension as well as to illuminate the roots of the problem of Orang Asli pupils’ literacy. The findings from our initial research suggested that there is a gap between the literacy learning and teaching practices experienced by the children at home and the literacy practices that are expected by the teachers in school. Therefore, we believe that in order to assist the Orang Asli children’s literacy practices it is important to bridge this gap which exists. However, to help the Orang Asli pupils we faced a few challenges as academics. These will be described and related to in the following sections.

Although this research was carefully prepared, we are still aware of its limitations and shortcomings. First
of all, the research was conducted has to do with the extent to which the findings can be generalized beyond the cases studied. The number of cases is too limited for broad generalizations. The population of the Orang Asli pupils and teachers is small, only thirty-five students and might not represent the majority of the Orang Asli pupils.

Further empirical evaluations, however, are needed to replicate the findings in different contexts and surroundings. The second limitation in our study depends on having access to people, organizations, or documents.

**METHODOLOGY**

**Research Design**

To work with the Orang Asli community, we needed to carry out a qualitative based research where physically we needed to work with the school in their village. This study is a qualitative research case study. We believed that we could develop a module to start a literacy programme in the school and to encourage literacy practices in the school where the Orang Asli children can also experience literacy in and out-of-school context. We wanted a name for our literacy module. The name should stand for the everyday challenge of being literate as well as the historical and sociological stance of sustaining literacy practices. The name must also refer to the Orang Asli pupils both “living out” their literacy practices and having their literacy practices ‘live on’. We decided to call our literacy module 3 Column Module for Constructing Sentence in Malay Language (3C).

Merriam (1998) indicate that the case studies are used to enhance a deep understanding of the subject is reviewed, focusing on aspects of the process than output, and emphasizes discovery rather than confirmation of a theory or finding. According to Yin (1989a), the case studies are related to the research strategy that focuses on the question of ‘who’, ‘why’ or ‘what’. This means that case study research allows a comprehensive or holistic approach to determine the characteristics of an event or a real life. To get the complete picture, a case study should collect data from various sources to enable a deep understanding of the research (Burn, 1989). The participants of this study consisted of 33 Year 5 Orang Asli pupils and two teachers in Terisu Elementary School. Purposeful sampling methods were used in this research because this study involves the analysis of problems relating to the Malay language literacy among the Orang Asli pupils, the purpose of sampling is chosen as it is believed to represent the objectives of an investigation related to phenomena to be studied. Burn (1989) chose to portray the case but Silverman (1993) to choose samples so as to provide the information in this study. Creswell (2009) and Bogdan and Biklen (2003) states that through this sampling, the respondents were selected to provide the best source of information in understanding the phenomena studied. The researcher uses two experienced teachers who have taught for more than seven years and are willing to volunteer to be respondents in this study.

There are two phases in our research. The first phase is need analysis where effort is taken to identify issues, concerns and needs of the targeted audience. The present study looked into issues concerning the teaching and learning of Malay Language among the Semaı elementary school students. In this study we concentrated on the design and development of the pedagogical module and the focus on developing sentence structure. Since the context of the study was the indigenous community, data was collected from the context as well as from the people who had knowledge about the indigenous people. Finally, the second phase was the implementation and evaluation of the module. Interview sessions with the teachers and teachers’ response were analyzed to further support the evaluation procedure.

**Data Collection Method**

This section will describe some of the procedures performed to plan and execute the process of collecting data. Because the data collection process is complex, it must be planned and executed carefully. In qualitative research, rapport between researchers and respondents is necessary to reduce the concern and to build a trust (Glesne, 1999). Rapport facilitate researchers enough information to research and a built rapport allows respondents to give different information, personnel, or play in a normal situation and feel safe without being influenced by the presence of researchers. Data were collected from two different methods which were interview and document analysis. The interview gave valuable insights about the issues as well as the needs of the Orang Asli pupils in developing sentence structure in writing essay in Malay language. We worked together with teachers who are chosen as respondents. Rapport of researchers with teachers is one key factor in determining the success of this research. Through face to face interviews, the conversation was recorded using a tape recorder and record notes. Interviewing session began by asking the basic questions of general and simple form and then leads to more focused. This session was conducted to clarify the problems faced by Orang Asli pupils in learning the subjects in essay writing in Malay language.

**Interview**

There are several types of instruments used to collect the information in our research. Our backbone method of collecting data is through interview techniques. Patton (1990), states that there are three types of interview techniques. They are formal
interviews, informal interviews and open interviews. In this study, we used semi-structured interviews because it is flexible and this allows respondents to describe what techniques it considers appropriate for this study. We interviewed teachers who taught Malay Language subject in Orang Asli schools. The instruments used in this study were interview protocol based on the concept of triangulation. The purpose of these interviews was to identify the major problems of Orang Asli pupils in the teaching of constructing sentence in essay writing.

In this study, the researcher used interviews in the first phase to identify the issues in the current pedagogy of developing sentence structure as well as the needs of the Orang Asli pupils with regard to reading comprehension. The interviews in this phase were carried out with two Malay language teachers from Orang Asli school. Data from the interviews were analyzed and categorized into themes that emerged pertaining to the first research question were comprehension, sentence structure, the present curriculum specification for Malay language, and reading text.

**Data Analysis**

Content analysis approach as suggested by Miles and Huberman (1984), and Merriam (1998) was used to analyze the interview data. According to Burn (1989) content analysis is a method of analysis is often used in qualitative research. Content analysis is used to identify themes, concept and meaning. In this case, requiring content analysis coding system associated with the goal of an investigation. The process of encoding make a researcher to understand the information obtained and to guide him to decide what should be focused on further information. Miles and Huberman (1984), states that coding is not something that has data ready to be analyzed, but it is rising continuously during the data collection process. All information obtained through interviews, will be heard again by the researcher through the tape recordings and compare them with records that are made. The analysis of interview data is done manually, by the questions posed. The analysis of interview data was conducted in two stages, namely (i) the recording of the interview transcriptions (ii) search for themes and coding. Following is the description of the procedure in phase 1.

**Data Triangulation**

Reliability reflects the situation that an investigation has replicated the findings of the research should be done in the same situation (Merriam, 1998). Triangulation is one method that can improve the reliability of a qualitative research (Merriam, 1998). Further triangulation method can improve the credibility of the findings and recommendations that resulted in an investigation (Lincoln, 1995; Stake, 1995). It is expected that the use of triangulation methods involving data from various sources, namely interviews with teachers who are teaching the Malay language and document the pupils in these schools are expected to increase the reliability of this research.

**Data collection Method for Phase 2**

The research question in phase 2 was to find out the most appropriate design for the 3C pedagogical module. Data were gathered from interviews and observations in the context of the study.

**Interviews**

Two sessions of interviews will be carried out in Phase 2. First a panel of experts in content will be interview to gain information for the 3C Pedagogical module. The experts in content include two experts in subject matter which was Malay Language and two experts with knowledge and experience of the Orang Asli and their context. The second session of the interviews will be conducted after the module was developed. Two experts will review the module and will provide their comments as well as suggestions for the module before implementation. The interviews will focus on the experts’ view on the different module components. The components included the language, the layout of the text, the comprehension strategy and the comprehension task.

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**Figure 1.2. Research Procedure in the design phase 2**

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Observation
Data were also collected from observation at the Orang Asli school. We will observe the Malay Language lessons taught by the teachers. Several trips will be made to this location and during these visits; data will be gathered from the lessons observation in the form of pictures taken with digital camera as well as video shots.

Year 5 Curriculum Specifications for Malay Language
The construction of sentences structure for the module were developed based on three skills from the writing component of the Curriculum Specifications for Year 5 and the selection of the skills was based on teachers’ advice.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
What are the main problems of Orang Asli pupils in learning how to construct sentences in essay writing using Malay language?
The present study showed that all respondents agreed that Orang Asli pupils face various problems in constructing sentences in essay writing using the Malay language. Some of the problems confronted in learning and constructing sentences in essay writing are problems of limited vocabulary. The main problems associated with limited vocabulary, comprehension and reading problems, namely; there were three or four pupils who can’t even read in the classroom. Although there are pupils who can read but not all of them understand the meaning of sentences particularly the complex sentences. Majority of the pupils are unable to master the basic skills of reading, speaking and writing. For them 3M meant; playing (main), eating (makan) and singing (menyanyi) instead of reading (membaca), writing (menulis) and counting/arithmetic (mengira).

In terms of writing skills, data from the interviews showed that only a handful of pupils can construct sentences using simple Malay Language vocabulary. Even writing sentences in Malay language structure, the pupils use the native language and translate directly to Malay language.

We know that students who can’t write will have a problem in comprehension for example the picture shows kettle for “boil water” ... they did not know what is boiling... boiling water ... they only knows cooking. For these students cooking is a blanket terms for everything...many pupils have a limited vocabulary in Malay Language. (R1). When we teach reading and comprehension, we give a picture to the pupils, below the picture we write what is boiling, cooking, steaming...we have to explain what is in the picture that, if we only tell them without a picture they can’t imagine the thing...their vocabulary of concepts is very limited ... very low. (R2)

In terms of oral communication, the present study showed that the pupils are comfortable in speaking their own language rather than using Malay language. Pupils are not only using their native language (Semai language) when they interact with family members at home but they also speak while in the classroom and in school canteen. Malay language was not regularly used when they spoke with friends. Therefore, it can be concluded that Semai language is the main language, Malay language only act as a second language while English is the third language.

Another problem in terms of their existing knowledge was much less in terms of the use of words, the vocabulary is very poor. There think through their own language, the Malay language become a second language. I fined them 10 cents if my pupils talks in their language in my classroom but they did not talk only during the lesson but sometimes they whispered to their friends in Semai language. (R2)

Relatively limited used of Malay language outside school is because of the environmental factors. The Semai language structure influences them in constructing sentence in Malay language.

The pupils are compelled to write a composition in Malay Language UPSR examination. What I did is that the pupils must complete the 3 column as a guideline to complete the sentences they construct. If I do not prepare the column for constructing the sentences they sentence they construct is incomplete. This technique can only be adopted for rural schools only and when I use this technique it is easy for them to understand and construct sentences in Malay Language. (R1)

Problem with their Cognitive Level
The issue and reasons why Orang Asli pupils do not grasp the lesson taught by the teachers need to be addressed. Results showed that they cannot understand and followed the lesson taught by the teachers because of their cognitive level. This is due to their low ability to understand the Malay Language lesson. The study also found that they could not understand the subjects, particularly the subjects that needs problem-solving because they are weak in reasoning power. The reasoning power is weak because they do not try to understand a lesson.

Orang Asli pupils are very weak in memorizing ... we gave them to read a passage. They can’t understand the
The findings from the interviews showed that Orang Asli pupils are not strong enough in terms of cultural learning. Their learning process is only valid when they come to school. When they return home, there is no motivation for them to review homework or study. Their parents did not play a role in learning process to their children. 

"You can’t discipline them if they are already poor. Orang Asli are expected to do the work to earn homework.

The findings also showed that all respondents agree that the sociocultural and environmental factors also lead to Orang Asli pupils less concerned about the important of education. Moreover, the levels of nutrition at home play an important role in mental and physical development of the Orang Asli pupils.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS
The first phase of the present study was conducted to explore the main problems faced by Orang Asli pupils in constructing sentences structure in Malay language essay writing. The study also identifies the problem of achieving literacies among the Orang Asli pupils particularly to pupils of Terisu Elementary School. Mastery of writing skills among Orang Asli children should be emphasized for the information transfer process will be faster. In this case, we will develop a pedagogical module for pupils of indigenous peoples. The process of producing this module is an ongoing process and the second phase is to test this module by using experimental methods and expert opinion. The construction of this module takes into account the views of Steinberg (1982) that children can read faster if the lesson began with meaningful elements.

This study gives researchers a wealth of information about the culture and mentality of Orang Asli pupils. What styles and methods of teaching and learning are suitable for them, especially in essay writing? The study is significant on that it provides a methodological framework and pedagogical principles which can be replicated in other context.

REFERENCES


