

The Role and Perspectives of Administrators in the Schools of Orang Asli Students: A Case Study in the State of Pahang

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Abstract. This study discusses the role and perspectives of administrators towards the schools and education of ‘Orang Asli’ (Original People) students. This case study was carried out regarding to the problems related to the role played by school administrators that give implications for the quality of Orang Asli education. Two primary school administrators involved in the semi-structured interview to answer the focused questions on seven modified aspects of GPILSEO Model. The interview was audio-taped, transcribed and checked for content based on predetermined themes. The findings showed that school administrators have moderate targets in improving the achievements of Orang Asli students, encouraging fun method of teaching and learning, and stated the equipments needed by the school were sufficient but in a sorry state. The findings also showed they carried out assessments for teachers and students as scheduled and helped to distribute assistance from government in the forms of money and materials to the students. The final finding showed that the school administrators and their teacher were highly committed in managing the school of Orang Asli. This gives a major implication that the school administrators should play a role as an agent planning to increase the achievement of Orang Asli students in education.

Keywords: Role of Administrators, Indigenous Students, Indigenous Education, Pedagogy

1. Introduction

Along with the rapid progress of the country to pursue Vision 2020, awareness of the importance of educational knowledge is increasing, especially among the present generation. Thus, society has placed educational institutions as formal institutions that are responsible in providing the best education for their children. Hence to achieve excellence in a school, school administrators play a major role in ensuring the success of the organization. The effort to pursue and achieve excellence in education lies in the hands of school administrators [1] including the Orang Asli schools in Malaysia. Orang Asli, or literally translated as “Original People” is a Malay term for the indigenous minority community in Peninsular Malaysia. Records from the Department of Orang Asli Affairs (JAKOA) indicate that there are about 147,412 Orang Asli living in 869 villages, representing less than 1% of the total population of Malaysia [2].

The accountability of principals (school administrators) has been understood to establish and maintain good relationships among teachers, representing the role of instructional leader, and exhibiting budgeting practices [3]. School administrative leadership role is closely linked to the efforts to develop teaching and learning in schools. Often this process involves the implementation of innovative educational programs aimed at improving the performance of students especially Orang Asli students who are lagging behind in education. Research showed that high dropouts among Orang Asli children have become an issue as it was reported nearly 34% of those who had completed their primary schooling did not pursue their studies at the secondary level. The lack of interests in academic subjects at schools might be the reason [4], [5].

As a leader or manager of the school, particularly in Orang Asli schools, school administrators are expected to play a role, including providing incentives in disseminating information, conducting staff development activities and to build good relationships between schools and surrounding communities and develop a happy school environment that can receive, nurture and support changes from the outside [6]. The role of school administrators is seen as a determinant of success and failure in the implementation of education programs in schools in particular.

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2. Research and Problem Background

The level of achievement in education for Orang Asli students' should be noticed by all. Studies conducted by JAKOA found the lack of involvement of Orang Asli students at both secondary schools and also in higher education is due to the low level of schooling [7]. If one hundred Orang Asli students entering year one, only six students will be graduating up to Form 5. The total of 94 percent of these students cannot be traced either graduated or not [8]. This situation is due to the school environment, community, family and teachers, including school administrators that less supportive of the excellence in education of native students and consequently lead to dropout in primary and secondary school levels [9].

There are indications that show a significant dropout during standard 4 and 5 at the level of primary school [10]. Among the cause of dropout is the limited educations facility such as computers, internet and specialized training for teachers in handling Orang Asli students to improve education levels of Orang Asli students [11]. The lack of knowledge of teachers and school administrators about Orang Asli culture causes less interaction and created discomfort between teachers and pupils [12]. Difficulty to interact due to poor mastery of Malay language among Orang Asli students causes poor understanding of the lesson and it leads to errors in the learning acceptance. Teaching a second language to non-native students need careful consideration, planned and implemented in a natural and not too formal and this aspect should be considered by school administrators of Indigenous students.

Based on the issues and problems mentioned above it is clear that there is a need for a study to be carried out to obtain the latest information and input relating to the role of school administrators based on the aspects that drive and hamper the improvement of educational achievement of Orang Asli students because these children not only come from a marginalized minority community in rural Malaysia, but also because learning is much more challenging for them.. Thus, in this research, the researcher focuses on the aspects that are presented in the GIPLSEO Model as a guideline to help improve understanding of the necessities required by Orang Asli students in raising the educational achievement of Orang Asli students in primary schools and followed by recommendations to an alternative conceptual framework to suit the cultural background and needs of Orang Asli students in this country.

3. Research Conceptual Framework

Conceptual framework of this study is built on a model developed by Bishop and O'Sullivan in reviewing the achievements of Maori's education in New Zealand [13]. The GPILSEO model has already proven to be a success in raising the educational achievement of Maori students in New Zealand and participate actively in schools and society since 2001 through the program of *Te Kotahitanga* [14], [15]. The conceptual framework of this study is built on seven aspects which are Goals, Pedagogy, Institutions, Leadership, Spread, Evidence and Ownership which will be discussed through the perspectives of school administrators such as Headmaster and Academic Senior Assistant. The seven aspects discussed in this study are needed to ensure success, sustainability and scale of reform of Aboriginal community's education. The specification on the aspect of the goals refers to the goals and expectations of school administrators in targeting Orang Asli students' achievement in the examination and education studied. The second aspect is pedagogy which is to know school administrators' monitoring of the elements related to teachers' pedagogy in teaching and learning in the classroom. The third aspect of institutions is related to school infrastructures to support the initiatives in the classroom and school. The fourth aspect which is leadership means to determine the level of leadership from the school administrator's responsive and proactive actions. The fifth aspect is spread which is associated with how the school administrators help to distribute assistance from the government to the students so they are keen to learn and continue until secondary school. The sixth aspect which is evidence is associated with testing and evaluation using appropriate tools to provide evidence to monitor the performance for both students and teachers. The final aspect which is ownership related to the high level of commitment in educating Orang Asli students. The state education of Orang Asli students will be analyzed according to the administrator perspectives and the improvement of school administrator roles towards improving the quality of education of Orang Asli students is proposed. However, the seven aspects have been modified and adapted according to the needs of this study to suit the Orang Asli community in this country. The conceptual framework can be seen in Fig 1.

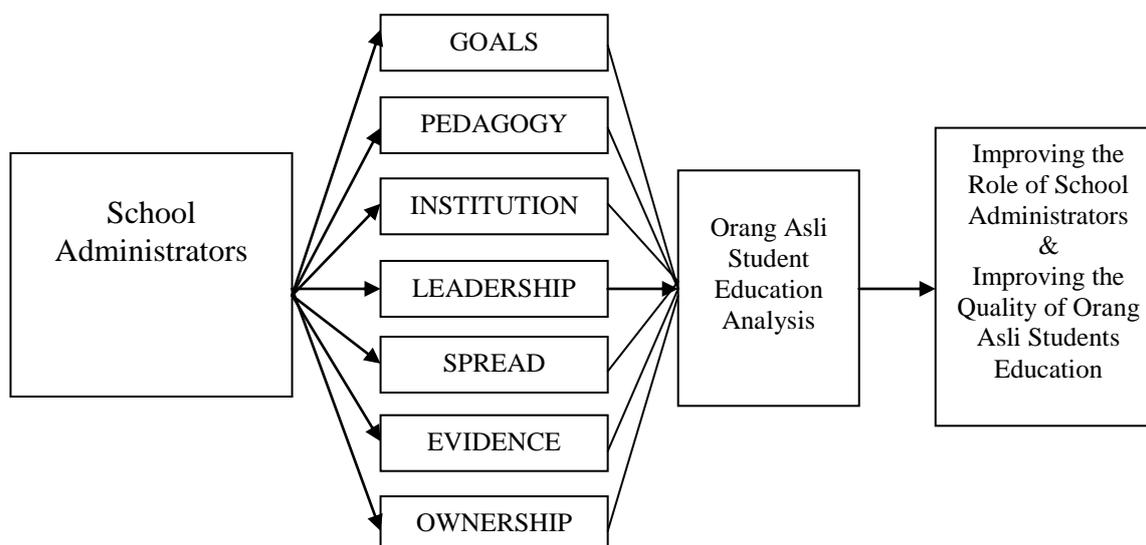


Fig. 1: The conceptual framework adopted from the Model of GPILSEO (Bishop & Sullivans 2005)

4. Research Methodology

This study uses the case study method. Data obtained in this study were gathered through semi-structured interviews. Because this research examined the perceptions and experiences of participants, a qualitative approach allowed for more in-depth analysis and greater freedom to analyze unforeseen occurrences during the process. "...a qualitative method facilitates study of issues in depth and detail (p.14)" [16]. In this study, the respondents were selected using random purposive sampling method. Sample selection criterion is based on the criteria that they taught at the Orang Asli students' school, aged between 35 to 45 years and has been working as a Orang Asli school administrator for at least three years. These two participants were coded as SA1 and SA2. Location of this study involves two primary Orang Asli school located around the state of Pahang. Pahang has the largest populations of Orang Asli in Malaysia. This study uses a set of interview protocol and protocol questions of this interview were constructed in the form of open questions where the respondents are free to express their views. However, interviewer should guide the discussion so that it will not deviate. As a guideline, the research used Cohen Kappa agreement scale. The coefficient of Cohen Kappa has been used to determine the reliability of interview data. Two or more expertise are needed to evaluate this technique by using Cohen Kappa coefficient formulae [17]. The value for Cohen Kappa index for this research is 0.98. This is a very good and reliable value because the analysis unit done by the researcher is parallel with the theme.

5. Findings and Discussions

Predetermined thematic analysis used for this study are: (a) perspectives of School Administrators based on goals, (b) perspectives of school administrators based on pedagogy, (c) perspectives of school administrators based on institutions, (d) perspectives of school administrators regarding leadership, (e) perspectives of school administrators based on spread, (f) perspectives of school administrators based on evidence, and (g) perspectives of school administrators based on ownership.

5.1. Perspectives of School Administrators based on Goals

In discussing the main theme of the school administrators based on goals, one of the respondent did not set a target of high academic achievement for the school but the Education Department and Ministry of Education level set a higher target. This statement is not supporting the importance of building a shared goal by all parties involved in the educational process, particularly in the school system [18]. These were the statements of the respondents, "...if it is based on schools' vision, student must be able to master the skills of reading, writing and counting but at district and department levels... they (Education Department and Ministry of Education) are targeting at higher level because they said a low target will get a low result..." (SA1). Based on the excerpt, it shows the respondents stated that school's performance target is just to enable the indigenous students to master the reading, writing, and counting

skills only. However respondent SA2 said that, "...since 2007 this school has achieved a good percentage of the UPSR (national assessment) for Orang Asli school. In 2010 we received 10% passing rate and in 2011 we will have students who may score at least 3A in order to fulfill the standard sets by the education department..." This finding is in line with research that showed the Orang Asli schools need to set a higher target to ensure the students get good results and improve their academic achievement [19].

5.2. Perspectives of School Administrators based on Pedagogy

Based on the information obtained from the interview, SA1 viewed that Orang Asli students need an encouraging form of teaching and learning, "...with these students, if we are angry, they will not come to school...we must always give encouragement and show that we understand them..." (SA1). The Orang Asli students need lots of motivation and encouragement from their teacher in order to participate in the teaching and learning process. The other respondent (SA2) suggested the best way to teach them is to include music to add more fun in the learning process because they tend to get bored easily, "...students require music during their lessons, I have been here for a very long time ready, I understand their behavior well. I always advise all my teachers here to teach in a way that can excite the students. They quickly get bored..." (SA2). Based on the observations in a class, the school administrator creatively asked the Orang Asli students to sing a song to keep them active and participate in the learning process. This show the teacher must be creative and innovative in a classroom so that the teaching will always relevant and suitable with time and context [20], [21]. The findings also in line with a study towards Orang Asli students who found out that students love interesting and critical pedagogy rather than boredom textbook based, rather than 'chalk and talk' method [22]. A famous 'culturally relevant pedagogy' researcher said that a relevant and effective learning process is based on knowledge of students' culture, passed experienced and their presentation styles [23].

5.3. Perspectives of School Administrators based on Institutions

Both school administrators SA1 and SA2 said that the facilities at the school are adequate for the purpose of teaching and learning but it's in a sorry state. For instance, informants SA1 said, "...basically we have basic classroom facilities but mostly in poor condition. We have furniture however they are in terrible condition. There is no hall like in urban school to conduct programs. We have resource centre to accommodate the student' needs to read and borrow books but the number of books are limited. And the worst thing is we don't have enough funding to buy new equipments..." (SA1). This findings are in line with the study that found out the rural school like Orang Asli schools has lack of facilities, financial problems and the difficulties to sustain different roles in the school system compared to urban schools [24], [25]. However, recorded observations showed that the headmaster's office and general office are equipped with facilities such as computers, LCD, fax machines and internet. For both of them (SA1 & SA2), "...these facilities are very important because the location of school is far from the town..." and to "...facilitate communication, especially with the education office but they did breakdown from time to time..."

5.4. Perspectives of School Administrators Regarding Leadership

Both respondents said that the observation of teaching and learning are conducted by school administrators periodically. These were the statements of the respondents regarding the aspect of leadership, "...as the school administrators, I prepared the observation table to observe the teachers teaching and learning in class. We have instrument forms, one copy for the teacher and then the marks were given for them. Thus, the teachers will know their performance either good or not based on the marks given. Normally they will be observed twice a year..." (SA1). The school management has prepared the yearly observation table to be used as monitoring and observation of teachers' teaching in the classroom. The observation is conducted according to the given date. The monitoring and observation method supported the research who believed that observation can enhance teacher's quality of teaching [26], [27]. However, SA2 said, "it is more important to monitor the students' attendance to school. As long as students' attendance is good, we already feel successful because they can learn...". This finding showed the school administrators were more concerned about the students attendance compared to the performance of the teachers in school.

5.5. Perspectives of School Administrators based on Spread

Based on the interview results, the respondents agreed that Orang Asli community received assistance for their children from government and various parties. These were the statements by SA1, “...*nowadays the government gives school aids about RM100 per person for school purposes in the beginning of the year. If they have four schooling children they will receive RM400. Then, JAKOA also provided them with financial aids, transport services, school uniforms, stationeries, school bags, foods as well as other necessities...*” (SA1). As for SA2, “...*each family will received KWAMP (Poor Students Trust Fund) to be used by the families to buy school needs. In this school, we will give it direct to the parents and up to them how to use the money...*” (SA2). Many Orang Asli students received educational assistance from the government in the forms of pocket money, free books and school uniforms. It was estimated that for a student, the government has allocated RM 150 and RM 700 a year for a family respectively through Orang Asli Welfare Department (JAKOA) [28]. In addition, Orang Asli communities also received assistance from other party like FELDA (Federal Land Development Authority) and FELCRA (Federal Land Consolidation and Rehabilitation Authority). To foster interest in reading, the New Straits Times newspaper also provides news papers on weekly basis as reading materials for the Orang Asli students.

5.6. Perspectives of School Administrators based on Evidence

In the aspect of evidence, the educational achievement is clearly shown through assessment. The assessments were carried out for both students and teachers. These were the statements of the respondents, “...*as a Senior Assistant, one of our job scopes is to evaluate teachers’ performance. It is important to avoid teachers from taking for granted their attendance and their teaching...*” (SA1). The same goes to evaluation systems that were conducted every month, semester and year for the Orang Asli students. This was expressed by SA2 as followed, “...*evaluation system are based on assessment and examination that were conducted by the school through monthly, midyear and end of the year examination to assess students academic achievement*” (SA2). However, Orang Asli were given one-sided assessment due to incompatible contents and consequently it is hard for the students to memorize the lesson [29]. Moreover, it was also difficult to assess them accordingly because of their poor attendance in school throughout the year.

5.7. Perspectives of School Administrators based on Ownership

In the aspect of ownership, both school administrators agreed that they and their school teachers show high level of commitment in educating Orang Asli students. They were willing to work and sacrifice their time for the success of Orang Asli students education. One such response from respondent SA2 was, “...*some teachers including me are willing to sleep in the school whenever we have programs...we are willing to sacrifice our time and energy...*” (SA2). SA1 said, “...*for instance, today all the teachers did not go home since yesterday because we have program with the students and parents...*” This showed that the school administrators and teachers in Orang Asli schools are committed with the working hours and willingly to contribute in terms of energy and time. They contribute through working extra time and energy by giving extra classes to Orang Asli especially for Year 5 and Year 6 students in order to prepare them for examination. This explained the shift in the perspective of administrators regarding professional development where instead of working on teachers, it changes to working with them [30].

6. Summary

Based on the role and perspectives of school administrators as discussed, indicated that there are some elements that may be associated with the achievements and problems of education of Orang Asli students in school. In terms of research significance, this study to some extent provides information on the weakness and the strength of the Orang Asli education by looking into all aspects in GPILSEO Model. Among the school administrators, they have to change their perception on the capability of Orang Asli student achievement in education especially in terms of goals. However, information from the interview during the research also showed that there are some negative situations that can be attributed to Orang Asli lack of interest in education. Such as, elements related to effective pedagogy in the classroom. The school administrator should ensure all the teachers in Orang Asli schools to use encouragement and fun learning methods to their student. Besides that, school administrative proactive leadership is much needed to ensure

the smooth running of the school by observation of teaching and learning conducted by school administrators periodically, relevant assessment for teachers and student of Orang Asli, functionality of available facilities to create more conducive learning environment, and support from various parties need to be provided in the form that can assist the Orang Asli students' interest to come to school so that their attendance and their ownership (sense of belonging) will increase. The findings of this research are also expected to provide input for more effective planning and better execution of education program by the school administrators to improve the Orang Asli academic achievement in the future.

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