

# Education Transformation of Indigenous Peoples in Johor, Malaysia

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**Abstract:** The dimension of education is one of the aspects that also reaches the most important needs of every person. With knowledge and education, people are able to create history in the pursuit of values and build the dignity of civilization. In line with the existence of the village for the past 60 years, the need for knowledge and education has not been ignored. The opening of the village in Sg. Layau, Kota Tinggi, Johor around the 1960s has been a turning point in the dimension of the importance and domination of the education world for Indigenous peoples in Sg. Layau specially, and in Malaysia in general. Although the Indigenous people are often seen as a community of laggards in every aspect, often seen as isolating themselves from the outside world and even seen as rejecting modernization, but the reality of the Indigenous people also has the pulse of life of its own and quite unique that should be understood and respected by all as human beings. Their resilience in survival has shown that they are also capable of success. The discussion in this paper is more focused on the study of the success and capabilities of Indigenous peoples in education in one of the southern regions of Malaysia where not only has it been proven at the national level, but also at the international level.

**Keywords:** Education, Transformation, Indigenous, People

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## 1. Introduction

In terms of education, the Indigenous people are recognized as the earliest community in the country. Although past journeys have shown the scenario and evolution of education among Indigenous peoples has been slow. According to [7], the Indigenous people community is still marginalized in education even though their children show an interest in learning. But when they see outsiders show an interest in their children's education, they become more aware of the need for education [6]. There is no denying that among the Indigenous people who have succeeded and held good positions in the government sector [2]. Control of education and educational opportunities among children of Indigenous people is an important factor in enhancing the ability of self and change the destiny of life

towards a better quality of life. While jobs that provided income beyond the need give them space to save for old age preparation or in the face of adversity [8]. Increased income is also seen as helping the Indigenous people to become more prosperous and comfortable [1].

In short, by achieving higher levels of education among Indigenous peoples, it is also a marker of the evolution and transformation of education dimensions for the Indigenous peoples of the country. Through education we will create a knowledgeable community that will enable the Indigenous people to be able to stand tall with the community of other nations. To achieve this goal, awareness of education among students and parents or guardians of the Indigenous people is especially important in order to generate themselves in a more meaningful way.

## 2. Background of Study

Native settlements are usually based in the interior. According to a study by [9], the geographical position of aboriginal settlements far inland has strengthened most indigenous peoples' belief that there is no benefit to sending their children to school. Regarding to UNICEF statistics [17], there are approximately 80 per cent of Aboriginal children who never finished school at the secondary school level. Through a study by Mahat Mat Dong in [8] as well, the issue of education dropout among Indigenous people stems from one or more of these factors as a result of a relatively close family bond, in which children refuse to stay away from family. Therefore, this study is designed to delve into current issues and realities that are expected to show better transformation than the past.

According to the Education Development Master Plan (PIPP), the aim of the Ministry of Education Malaysia is to ensure that all schools and students have the same opportunities and capabilities to excel, across the nation. To achieve this goal, the educational gap that needs to be bridged to improve access, equity, and quality is the urban and rural gap, the digital divide, the gap between student achievement, the gap between the normal student and the special needs student and the socioeconomic gap. Referring to the policies and goals of the Ministry of Education Malaysia which prioritize equality of educational opportunities, this study was also conducted to determine the extent to which this goal was achieved in helping to improve education in Indigenous peoples.

## 3. Focus of Study

The focus of this study is to explore the evolution and transformation of the education dimension among Indigenous peoples as a significant beneficiary in Sg. Layau Indigenous Village (Kg. Sg. Layau), Kota Tinggi, which is as one of the districts at south of Johor state in Malaysia. The process of mastery of knowledge and education for the community here is not only focused on the existence of primary schools, but also with early education such as kindergartens, which also symbolize that the educational process here is in line with holistic needs. In fact, it is increasingly integrated and balanced between the world and the afterlife with education in religious primary schools, as a strengthening of the spiritual elements of life [19].

### 3.1. The Evolution and Transformation of Education in Indigenous Village

The provision of basic education and the provision of incentives from the government assistance has continued to be a real channel to provide stability identity of children for Indigenous people as human capital which is comparable to the non-Indigenous [14]. The ability was clear through the success of indigenous children here in studies at the highest level as colleges and universities, and also be able to reach

the international level in the fields of study that Malaysia can be proud of. These efforts and expectations should be continuously consistent [19].

Certainly, the capacity of the people here in the education world is very relevant to the nation's efforts towards building a first-class nation, in line with the pursuit of high-income developed countries. Children of Indigenous peoples here were also fortunate because the process of their learning and teaching in education are assisted financially either subsistence help or even scholarships by the government through the Department of Indigenous People (JKOA) [14].

### 3.2. The Scenario of Education in Sg. Layau Indigenous Village



Figure 1. Sg. Layau Primary School, Sg. Layau Indigenous Village.



Figure 2. Taska Permata Kemas, Sg. Layau Indigenous Village.



Figure 3. Kemas Kindergarten, Sg. Layau Indigenous Village.



**Figure 4.** Religious School, Sg. Layau Indigenous Village.



**Figure 5.** Scenario in Taska Permata Kemas.



**Figure 6.** Learning Process in Kemas Kindergarten.



**Figure 7.** Teaching Process in Kemas Kindergarten.

## 4. Research Methodology

Targeted focus groups are Indigenous peoples consisting of parents among them who are directly or indirectly involved in education. Information was also obtained from teacher and village chief who serve the indigenous community in this village.

The research method used is the qualitative. The qualitative methods used in this study were through interviews and observations. This interview method involved seven respondents as will be discussed further in the findings section.

## 5. Findings

### 5.1. Evolution and Transformation of Education in Sg. Layau Indigenous Village

Sg. Layau primary school at Kota Tinggi was the first school opened in 1966 by the Department of Indigenous Affairs (JHEOA). It was originally a branch school for the Tanjung Buai and was taken over by the school of Telok Sengat were shared the administration until 31 December 1991 [13]. On 16 December 1992, after through several periods in sharing administration, finally the school was under the administration of their own. Students who comprise children Indigenous people from 'Orang Kuala' (the majority), and the tribe of 'Laut and Jakun' people (the minority) have performed a progressively increased each year. The school has three caps with the brand as under-enrolled schools, the School of Indigenous and Amanah School of Malaysia (ie a combination of government corporate Foundation and Amir). Also was awarded the Hope School Award of State Level in 2005, and Excellent School Award of National Level in 2007 for the entire category of Indigenous schools [18].

The school, which was selected as one of the Trust Schools of Malaysia in 2011, is part of an effort to raise the status quo of government schools to match private schools [18]. Some of the consistent efforts that led to the transformation in education scenario as catalysts for success include the implementation of UPSR Camps, Guidance Classes, Knowledge Travel Programs, Customer Day Meetings, Parent Day Program, Parent Adult Class (KEDAP), Community-Based Computer literacy and other activities that involve parents, teachers and students together. As a result, the school managed to produce 80%-95% attendance at the school [18].

With the integration of programs covering the development of the education domain, the school has been recognized as the Best Schools of Johor Indigenous Schools Category and has been a three-time Johor Indigenous Sports Association Champion. Not only that, the school also won the Orang Asli Best School UPSR GPS Award in third place [18].

It is clear that there has been an evolution and dynamic transformation in education in this village. The current number of pupils at the school, which was registered in

August 2017, is 86 in the mainstream, one in Special Education and 20 in preschool. Meanwhile, the number of teachers including the headmaster was 16, plus three management staff. Some of these primary school graduates comprising Indigenous people in this village have been able to further their education at national and foreign higher education institutions such as India and Korea [13].

Education and counselling are offered by children Indigenous people not only scored in primary schools alone, but also as young as obtained at the Taska Permata (for children ages 2-3 years old) and kindergarten of FELCRA Sg. Layau (for children ages 3-5). Preschool children ages 5 to 6 can also get an education at Sg. Layau Preschool. For religious education, there are Religious Schools Sg. Layau. The operations runs in the evening. For secondary education, the children of Indigenous people here will continue their schooling at the vocational school. Semenchu located in Felda Semenchu, Kota Tinggi.



**Figure 8.** The Teaching Session at Religious School, Sg. Layau Indigenous Village.



**Figure 9.** The Learning Session at Religious School, Sg. Layau Indigenous Village.

In helping to improved education among the children of parents of children with Indigenous people in this village, Natural Adult Class Parents and Indigenous (KEDAP) are carried out consistently run entirely by teachers of school. They use ICT as a base with classes three times a week. English language learning is also provided to enhance

knowledge and to broaden the experience to adults about the importance of knowledge in life. Education is given skills can also help boost confidence and opportunities to increase income among them [13].



**Figure 10.** Adult Class Session, Sg. Layau Indigenous Village.

## 5.2. The Success of Aboriginal Children in Education

### 5.2.1. Interview 1



**Figure 11.** Personal Interview with Mrs. Yatimah Salih.

The first respondent was Mrs. Yatimah Salih. She is a teacher at Kg. Sg. Layau School since 2005. She is a descendant of the tribe of Kuala, a permanent resident in the Sg. Layau Indigenous Village. Her success has also become an icon and a testament to the success indigenous children in the village. She has also successfully obtained his diploma and bachelor's degree in education. She was convinced that Indigenous children can be successful too. She is also very committed and often inspired Indigenous children in school that do not feel inferior but need to continue to explore the

potential of persistent, and courageous to transform themselves in order to achieve success and excellence. Respondents also had a child who had successfully continued their schooling in religious school.

### 5.2.2. Interview 2

Mrs. Maimunah Jaffar is a resident of the 43-year-old in Sg. Layau Indigenous Village. She was born in Sialu Island, Batu Pahat and is a YDP PIBG (The Head of Parent Teacher Association) in Sg. Layau school. She is a member of KEDAP and has been there for 3 years. According to respondents, the KEDAP program offers education to Indigenous communities with high rates of literacy, while helping Indigenous adults in Indigenous communities to monitor their children's education. She has a son who is currently pursuing his studies at Sultan Zainal Abidin University (Unisza), and also as a YDP Student Representative, having previously won the Johor JAUHAR Ambassador. Her second child is currently studying at the Institute of Teacher Education (IPG). Her third child was also no less remarkable for having received an offer to continue his studies in France. However, due to some constraints, the offer was rejected. Her son has just graduated from the College of Matriculation in Malacca and will be attending a public university. Her perseverance and passion for education for her children have made her persistent in all its challenges and hardships. She feels so grateful to have received government funding through JKO A for her children's education such as RM4700 per semester for undergraduate studies, RM250 per month for tuition and matriculation and RM2.00 per day for the self-help each of her children's.



Figure 12. Personal Interview with Mrs. Maimunah Jaffar.

### 5.2.3. Interview 3

The next respondent was Mrs. Una Limau, or the friendly call was Mak Una. She is 56 years old and she is the only native of the Jakun tribe living in this village. Her husband is a Malay Banjar and worked as a fisherman. Some of Mak Una's children have studied at Technical High School. Mak Una's fifth child is a student at the Universiti Teknologi Mara (UITM) Puncak Alam, while one of Mak Una's daughters is

proud of her family and the rest of the villagers for continuing studies at Chung Ang University, South Korea with MARA (Majlis Amanah Rakyat) sponsorship. Mak Una has always encouraged her children to prioritize education that can help change their destiny and improve their lives. Although Mak Una's children often fell prey to their neighbours and friends in childhood because of the Aboriginal descent, Mak Una and her husband were always positive and helped strengthen their children's morals.



Figure 13. Personal Interview with Mrs. Una Limau.

### 5.2.4. Interview 4

The fourth respondent was Mrs. Noryati Mohamad, aged 46. She is the second generation in this village, and she is one of the Kuala Indigenous people. Three of her children had achieved 4A 1B in the UPSR examination and then they are succeeded in schooling, allowing them to continue their studies at university. Her eldest son earned a bachelor's degree from the Universiti Teknologi Mara (UITM) Puncak Alam and assisted with a full scholarship from JKO A throughout his studies. Her second son, who is a medical doctor, has been sponsored by MARA and is currently studying medicine at a university in India. The third child is a MRS M graduated and is currently studying at the Institute of Teacher Education (IPG) in Kuala Lipis, Pahang. Respondent emphasized how important it was for her and her husband to monitor their children's movement, time management, discipline and their education while they were still in school. In addition, she has always given words of encouragement so that his children will always have a clear direction in life.



Figure 14. Personal Interview with Mrs. Noryati Mohamad.

### 5.2.5. Interview 5

The fifth respondent was the sister of the sixth respondent, Mrs. Selamah Md. Yunos and 56-year-old. Through her early efforts to continue her studies, she learned herself through grade six to succeed in the STPM exam. She later went on to study at the Institut Teknologi Mara (ITM) at the undergraduate level in Library & Information Science. Upon graduation, she got a job as a Librarian at the Universiti Teknologi Mara (UITM) Dungun, Terengganu. She worked there until her retirement in 2014. After retiring, Mrs. Selamah was active in community activities and was appointed as the Chairwoman of FELCRA Dynamic Woman (WADIRA) in Felcra of Sg. Layau, Cooperative Secretary for Felcra of Sg. Layau. Meanwhile, UMNO Head of Information in Sg. Layau and the Pengerang District Council Committee. She stressed that although she is a descendant of the Kuala Indigenous people, however, that should not be a reason for discouragement and humility. She strongly hopes that a new generation of Indigenous people will continue to strive for change and to move forward with other communities. Therefore, she also felt that it was time for all Aboriginal people in the country not to allow themselves to be left behind in an era of transformation that transcended all aspects, as they all demanded courage in the face of challenging currents for the indigenous people to be able to 'standing in the eyes of the world'.



*Figure 15. Personal Interview with Mrs. Selamah Md. Yunos.*

### 5.2.6. Interview 6

The next respondent is Mrs. Rohani Md. Yunos was born in 1954. She is a first-generation for Kuala Indigenous people. She has won the Second Rank of Sultan Ibrahim Medal (PIS II) for her services and efforts in community activities. She also received the Loving Award of Kota Tinggi District Level in 2014. She has seven children and five of them had been successful in their careers like as Assistant Land Surveyor, Assistant Auditor in the Customs Department, Petroleum Surveyor, Engineer and Jungle Squad. She is very passionate about education and always encourages her children to be diligent in pursuing knowledge so that they will have a bright future and will not trouble others. She also emphasized that having eight or 10 acres of land would not be enough for all the children to distribute. Therefore, for her children, children need to be wise in managing their own lives and putting education at the forefront, while maintaining a good reputation.



*Figure 16. Personal Interview with Mrs. Rohani Md. Yunos.*

### 5.2.7. Interview 7

The last respondent selected as the reference of this study to show the evolution and transformation in education of the Indigenous people in this village is Mrs. Norihan Aman. She is 53 years old and she is the wife of En. Shafie Mohamad, who is the Chairman of the Development and Security Village Committee of the Indigenous Development Department (JKKKOA) in Sg. Layau Indigenous Village. She had five children, three of whom were the earliest to prove that the Indigenous community of Kuala in this village was also successful in the university. Her first child is a Bachelor of Education degree from the Institute of Teacher Education (IPG) Tuanku Bainun Campus. The second child is a Bachelor of Education degree from Universiti Sultan Idris (UPSI), and the third son is a Bachelor of Science (Community Science) from the Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM). Her husband's perseverance in driving the progress and change of the village has been a tremendous catalyst for her and her children to continuously hold the principle that 'you can't make an omelette without breaking a few eggs', which is through commitment and consistent efforts in gaining useful knowledge. It is proven that they are also able to provide the best services to our beloved people and countries through the transformation of the world of knowledge and education.



*Figure 17. Personal Interview with Mrs. Norihan Aman.*

## 6. Conclusion

Overall, the communities of the Indigenous people of Kuala, Laut and Jakun people's in Sg. Layau Indigenous Village are also Malaysian peoples who also have the potential and ability to stand tall and sit low in participating in the progress and prosperity of the nation, including in the field of knowledge and education. The process of evolution in society and education for generations in the village has come to an era of transformation where Indigenous children here have successfully expanded the struggle themselves and their families to spiral out farther and can challenge their potential. Certainly, the function and role of the indigenous people in this village is also very much needed by the country, as the education obtained can provide a meaningful benefit as a legacy that has created the greatest civilization of all time. Education that extends to every aspect of society gained here is not only focused on academic and worldly development but also on human development. In fact, education is also experienced by all ages in the more competitive dimensions of knowledge sharing in line with the needs of the technology age. May all the Orang Asli achievements in this village are continuously to be cherished, appreciated and enjoyed together along with gratitude for all the facilities and true peace that existed in Malaysia.

## Appreciation

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