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Tham Jia Hao, Siti Salina Mustakim, Enio Kang Mohd Sufian Kang, Asnul Dahar Minghat, Abdul Hamid Abdul Rahim

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## Exploring the Needs of Alternative Curriculum among Bajau Pupils in Semporna, Sabah

Tham Jia Hao, Siti Salina Mustakim, Enio Kang Mohd Sufian  
Kang

Faculty of Educational Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia Malaysia

Asnul Dahar Minghat

Razak Faculty of Technology and Informatics, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia Kuala Lumpur  
Malaysia

Abdul Hamid Abdul Rahim

Tawau Teacher Education Institute, Ministry of Education Malaysia

### Abstract

There is no way for pupils to fall behind in school. The difference in growth in these pupils' lives will determine the future development of a nation. Bajau are an unidentified group of people who still live a maritime and nomadic lifestyle and have no access to formal education. They differ primarily in terms of socioeconomic status, place of residence, culture, historical origin, and citizenship. They have no chance of obtaining the government-provided education and spend their days on a boat or at the beach. This study is aimed to explore the needs of alternative curriculum among Bajau pupils in Semporna, Sabah. This research applied qualitative research by conducted focus group discussion with pupils from a national school in Semporna, Sabah. 15 pupils who meet the criteria as sample are purposely picked to participate in this research. All of the participants were able to express their perspectives and understanding. The data gathered demonstrated participants' enthusiasm for alternate curriculum. It is claimed that an entertaining alternative curriculum will entice students to attend school. As a result, there is an immediate need for us to create a fun learning alternative curriculum in order to reduce primary school dropout rates in Semporna, Sabah.

**Keywords:** Alternative Curriculum, Bajau, Education, Semporna, Fun Learning

### Introduction

Rural areas have a higher proportion of out-of-school children than urban areas. 16.7 percent of Sabah's children, particularly school-age children in rural areas, do not attend pre-primary school. 6.3 percent of primary school-age children do not attend school, with children aged 6+ having the highest percentage of out-of-school children (UNICEF, 2019). The high dropout rate will have an impact on Sabah's educational performance and will force pupils to engage in low-wage financial activities.

All children, whether documented or undocumented, should be allowed to acquire basic knowledge, such as reading and writing skills (Tham et al., 2021). Education goals should focus on educating individuals who follow the laws of the country, care for their health, independence, and responsiveness to the country, community, and family. This is in line with our National Education Philosophy, which seeks to produce individuals who are intellectually, spiritually, emotionally, and physically balanced and harmonious (MOE Malaysia, 2013). Students must be able to identify, embrace, and comprehend their position as moral values decision-makers in a democratic society (Mustakim et al., 2020)

There is no way to leave the children behind in their education especially Bajau children because this will cause social problems in Sabah in the future. Bajau is Sabah's second largest indigenous community. They are a tribe well-known for their cultural and historical treasures. The Bajau are mostly Muslims and are divided into two ethnic groups, the Bajau on the east coast and the Bajau on the west coast. In terms of dialect identity, language, customs, and cultural diversity, these two ethnicities differ (Marinsah et al., 2020).

They will make a difference in their lives if they are given the opportunity to learn more and receive formal education. It is difficult for them to enrol in government schools and receive a formal education like other children in our country. However, the children of Bajau should be entitled to informal education. Informal education should focus on how human capital can be developed and how to be a responsible citizen (Ismail, 2011). Not only can effective alternative education help stateless children, but it can also help documented pupils in schools improve their skills and knowledge.

Pupils in Semporna continue to drop out at a high rate. Many of them may not be academically inclined and will drop out of school early to support the financial of their families. Unfortunately, due to a lack of expertise, these children are trapped in low-wage economy activities. 21st-century skills such as critical and creative thinking abilities, generic skills, dispute resolution abilities, and social skills should be introduced into the Bajau curriculum. This is in line with Malaysia's Education Blueprint 2013-2025, which aims to prepare pupils for a career in information technology. Children should be equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to find work or to be self-sufficient in the future. Aside from that, extracurricular activities such as co-curricular activities can aid in the development of a moral individual. Pupils will benefit from field visits to an orphanage, an old folk home, a handicap rehabilitation centre, and a native village to develop moral practises such as community spirit, love, and caring in the community (Tham et al., 2020).

### **Problem Statement**

Children in pre-primary school have the highest rate of non-attendance, at 16.7 percent. Despite the fact that primary school enrolment has nearly reached universal (95 percent), there are still a significant number of children who are not enrolled. 23,560 primary school-age children, or 6.3 percent, do not attend school. Aside from financial reasons, lack of motivation to attend school is a factor that influences dropouts (UNICEF, 2019). Because of the high dropout rate, Sabah has the highest population levels without formal schooling. According to a UNICEF report (2019), one of the reasons Bajau children drop out of school is that they discover the school curriculum is irrelevant to them. The children discovered that the program's content was meaningless to them. As a result, a more contextualized programme is required to address the needs of children from specific backgrounds, particularly Bajau pupils. Pang et al. (2019), Aini et al. (2019), Wahab et al. (2017), and Chiam et al. (2016) have found that alternative fun learning curriculum has a variety of positive

effects on students and communities. The fun learning curriculum can aid in the development of students' literacy. However, research into the educational needs of Bajau students is lacking. As a result, there is a significant gap in our understanding of the level of fundamental skills of the Bajau pupils and their needs for fun learning curriculum.

### **Research Objectives**

The objectives of this research are: 1) To explore the school experience of Sea Bajau pupils at school, 2) To explore the needs of alternative curriculum among primary schools' Bajau pupils.

### **Literature Review**

Rural areas Education is an important component of economic development in order to combat poverty while also promoting democracy and a stable society. The Malaysian government has planned and implemented numerous programmes to improve the education of the country's minorities. These programmes try to address challenges such as school dropout, illiteracy, and poverty. However, according to the Early Report of Malaysia's Education Development Plan 2013-2025, indigenous and minority students' progress in national schools is extremely limited. As a result, several alternative schooling and programmes are being developed to address the aforementioned issues.

Aside from formal education, some children are unable to attend formal schooling in government schools. As a result, these students are being sent to alternative education centres to gain their fundamental knowledge and education. Chiam et al (2016) undertook a mixed-method study in order to determine the outcomes of Sabah's alternative education programme for illegal children. The programme was evaluated from two angles in this study. First, the learners' cognitive, emotional, and psychomotor domains were improved. Second, the program's value to the community. With 58 respondents, researchers conducted in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. They are made up of government employees, instructors, locals, JKKK members, pupils, and alumni. Researchers also gathered information from a questionnaire issued to 249 pupils. According to the data, the alternative education programme boosted the cognitive level of the pupils. Pupils who can apply their new information in their daily lives. Furthermore, the community demonstrated a stronger knowledge of the significance of education in their lives and future. According to the findings of this study, the alternative education programme had a good impact on the community's attitude, behaviour, and lifestyle.

Pang, Ling, and Tibok (2019) polled 249 people in their survey. The purpose of this survey is to look into the pupils' progress in the Murni Alternative Education Centre's alternative education programme. The findings revealed significant reductions in reading, listening, writing, and counting in literacy and numeracy. Pupils who could read the Quran and perform Islamic responsibilities and acts of worship experienced a little increase in religious practice. The awareness and respect for Malaysian identity has grown to Civics and Citizenship, with practically all children referring to themselves as "Malaysians." With the exception of environmental maintenance, enhanced self-management was also shown by increased concern for personal hygiene and well-being. In terms of Living Skills, the majority agreed that MAEC schooling will provide them with income-generating skills. These insights of MAEC outcomes based on learner experiences may be used to guide the restructuring of the MAEC and the Sabah curriculum in general.

Ngui et al (2017) investigated an alternative learning centre in Sabah. They used Stufflebeam's CIPP approach to assess the alternative learning centre's contribution. The researchers questioned key players such as the officer, the village security committee, the teachers, and the centre's administration. According to the findings, the major goal of the centre was to give basic education to illegal children. The programme, on the other hand, was brief, separable, and lacked a systematic evaluation. Significant services were either basic or limited, limiting the centre's full capacity as a training facility. Suggestions were made based on the findings of this report to help the centre plan and improve it.

Even while the government and non-governmental organizations are working hard to enhance education quality and accessibility for the country's minorities, we still have a long way to go to reduce illiteracy, particularly among Bajau people. There are certain areas where we can improve the teaching and learning process. First, consider the teachers' preparedness. According to Renganathan (2018), instructors who engage with indigenous children should incorporate cultural subtleties into their pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning alongside their students. Teachers should employ a bottom-up strategy instead of the typical top-down one. Teachers should also be prepared with the pedagogical abilities and competence required to educate aboriginal children. Teachers should employ technology in the classroom to connect with the Fourth Industrial Revolution and the twenty-first century (Salim et al., 2020).

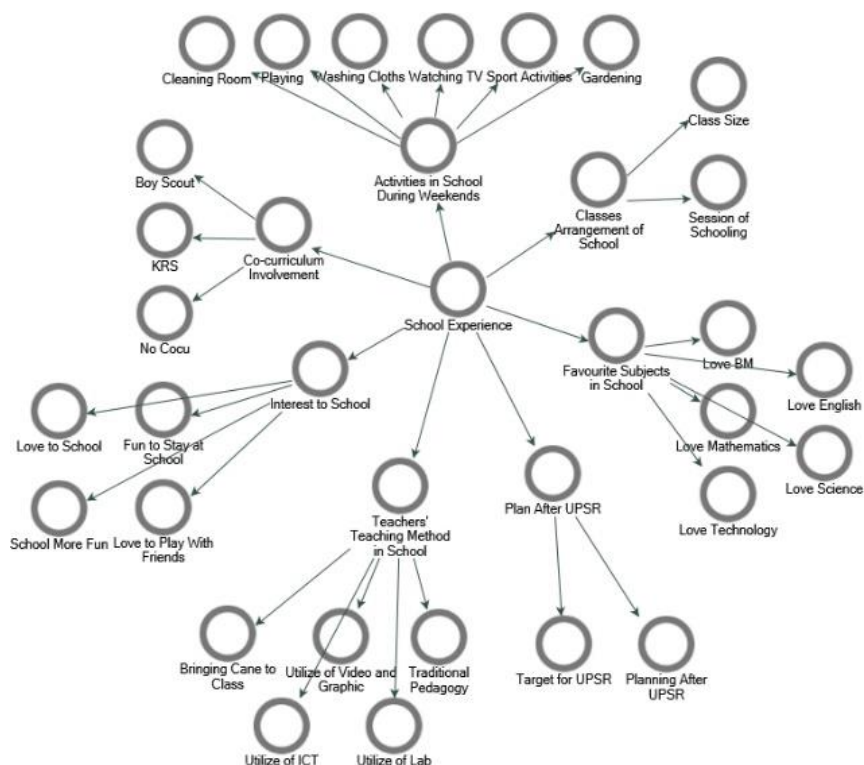
To win the hearts and minds of indigenous students to participate in formal education, teachers and teaching materials should be culturally appropriate. Instead of 'forcing' them to learn about city life, Jegatsen (2019) proposed that the 'outsider' teacher should understand and learn more about indigenous culture and incorporate it to the classroom. As a result, before imposing foreign influences on indigenous children in order to improve their success rates in assessment and testing regimes, teachers must consider their methods.

Language, according to Rabahi et al (2020), plays an important function as a connecting bridge between indigenous children and 'outsider' teachers. Each ethnic group has its own way of life and language. Salim et al (2020) discovered that indigenous children are more likely to learn in the language with which they are most familiar. They feel that local and customary knowledge relating to their living environment can help them understand new information. Informal education or learning, particularly for young indigenous children, can be incredibly valuable.

### **Research Method**

This research implemented focus group discussion to collect the information from the participants. One national primary school at Semporna was purposefully chosen as the study location in this study. This national primary school has the greatest number of Bajau pupils enrolled in formal education. This provides the researchers with the greatest possible exposure to contact the correct and accurate participants. 15 Bajau pupils who met the criteria as sample were selected to participate in the focus group discussion. A set of focus group protocols was created based on previous instruments created by previous researchers and a review of the literature.

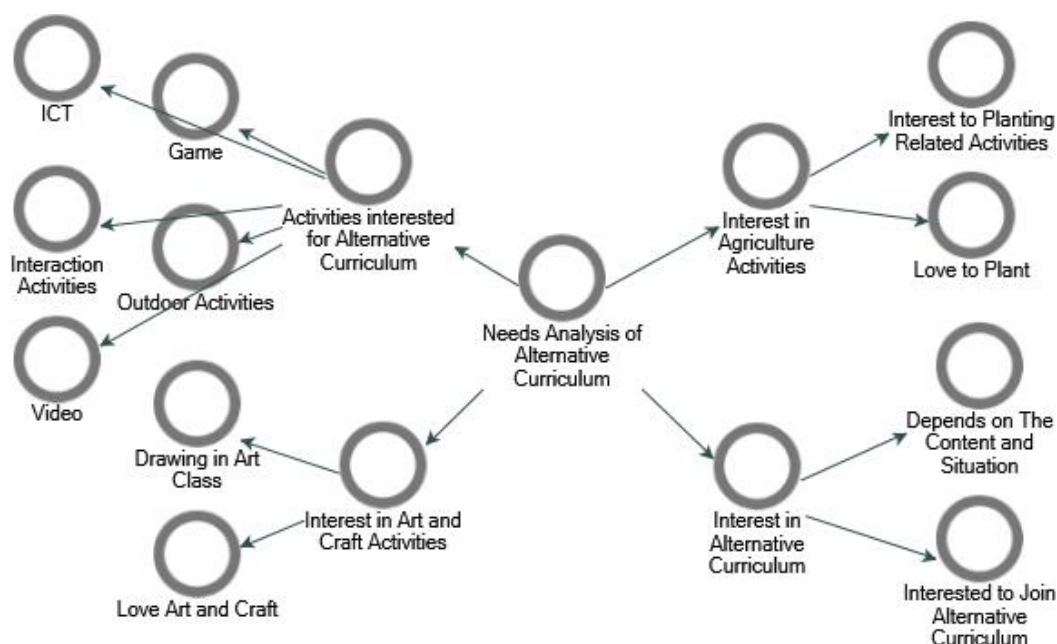
### **Findings**



**Figure 1. School Experience of Bajau Pupils**

Based on the discussions with the participants, the researcher discovered that the average class size in the school is between 20 and 25 pupils. Each standard is divided into two classes: Class A and Class B. All of the class sessions are in the morning. All of the participants stated that they enjoy going to school. Participants stated that they enjoy studying at school and believe that school is more enjoyable than home. This is because they can play with their classmates at school.

The hostel is home to all 15 participants. They will have their free time at school over the weekend. They all enjoy outdoor activities such as field sports, badminton, and football. They also enjoy watching television at school on weekends. During the weekend, the participants will clean their rooms and wash their clothes. They will participate in gardening activities alongside their teachers. Participants also participate in co-curriculum.



**Figure 2. Needs Analysis of Alternative Curriculum**

Participants stated that majority of the teachers use traditional teaching methods in the classroom. In order to teach, they use a whiteboard and a pen. They stated that their teachers would bring a cane to class because some of the pupils were not listening to the teachers and were making noise in class. Some teachers will use a projector and a laptop to teach. Teachers will occasionally take them to the computer lab and science lab. Participants also stated that teachers will conduct the class using YouTube, video, and graphics. They agreed that the use of YouTube and video is intriguing. They like how video and graphics are used to teach.

Since there are few activities at the school and hostel, the participants expressed a desire to participate in an alternative programme. If there are outdoor activities involved, they are interested. Participants proposed game-related activities that they thought would be fun. Computers and ICT can be used in the activities. Participants proposed activities that would include YouTube or video-related content. They would benefit from interaction and outdoor activities such as field activities.

All of the participants expressed an interest in gardening activities. They had a good time planting. They usually assist their teachers on the farm by watering the plants. The majority of participants expressed an interest in art and craft-related activities. In art class, they usually draw and colour.

### Conclusion

When they learned about the alternative programme, the participants were overjoyed. Their first thought of an alternative programme is that it will be fun because some of their friends have participated in alternative programmes in the past. They enjoy outdoor activities such as gardening. They will occasionally assist their teachers in planting vegetables in the garden. Participants expressed an interest in agricultural activities, but researchers discovered that their knowledge and skills in agriculture were limited. As a result, it is a good subject to include in an alternative curriculum. Throughout the discussion with the

participants, the researcher discovered that the participants' vocabulary and speaking skills are still lacking. They find it difficult to put their thoughts into words. Aside from that, their confidence is also low. They are embarrassed when people ask them questions. However, the participants showed their interest toward alternative curriculum and excited about it. It is believed that fun alternative curriculum can attract the pupils to attend to school. As a result, there is a critical need for us to develop a fun learning alternative curriculum in order to decrease the drop-out rate of primary pupils in Semporna, Sabah.

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