

## **The Level of Language Proficiency of Orang Asli Che Wong in Malay Language: The Analysis of UPSR Examination Results**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Che Wong's Language is a native language for the Orang Asli Che Wong students in Sekolah Kebangsaan Bolok, Pahang Darul Makmur while the Malay Language is their second language in everyday use and also in the classroom. This research is conducted to identify the level of Malay language proficiency in writing and comprehension based on the students' UPSR results. The Malay language proficiency of Orang Asli Che Wong students in Malay language is found to be very weak. This is proven by the previous examinations results for the period 2008-2012. Although the students' weaknesses in the Malay language proficiency cannot be justified based on their results alone, it is possible to serve as a basis to measure their weakness in the language. The weakness in the Malay language proficiency should be given serious attention because failing in the Malay Language subject will not only affect the students' future, it will also affect the improvement of the Orang Asli Che Wong's academic excellence in particular. This research adopts the interview method which includes Orang Asli Che Wong's students, the Headmaster and the teachers who teach Malay Language in Sekolah Kebangsaan Bolok. This research is a descriptive study which examines the UPSR examination results and the interview results obtained during the research. It was hoped that the study would be able to identify the reasons behind the lack of Malay language proficiency in writing and the comprehension aspects among Orang Asli students and also the measures that can be adopted to manage and minimise this problem.

*Keywords:* Che Wong, language proficiency, Malay language, native language, Orang Asli, primary school, second language, UPSR

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The Native people or Orang Asli is a term which will be used consistently in this paper.

Orang Asli are the indigenous peoples who first inhabited the Malay Land. The result of archaeological research conducted in a few mountains located in the southern and northern parts of the Peninsula showed that the ancestors of Orang Asli had inhabited the Peninsula since the 8th century BC, roughly about 10,000 years ago (Mohd Fauzi, 2006). Orang Asli are a minority in Malaysia (Sunaidin, 1997; Nicholas, 2000). They are considered minority because they are numbered 178,197 in 2010 representing a mere 0.6 per cent of the national population of 28 million (Nicholas, 2012).

According to *Jabatan Hal Ehwal Orang Asli* (JHEOA, 2003), Orang Asli in Malaysia are divided into three main tribes, namely Negrito, Senoi and Melayu-Proto. All these tribes have their own distinctive characteristics. Che Wong's tribe is the sub-tribe of Senoi. The Senoi is the biggest aboriginal community in Peninsula Malaysia. The Orang Asli are now given attention mainly by the Jabatan Hal Ehwal Orang Asli (JHEOA, 2010). The lifestyle of Orang Asli has also changed due to modernisation that has taken place in the country. They have also undergone changes in many aspects such as social, economy, religion, politics and language. However, there is still an opinion which regards them as not professing to any religion and not complying with any rules of life. These natives are considered 'stupid' and reluctant to accept any form of modernisation with some even claiming that they are wild and practise violence (Er et al., 2010).

Based on the statistics from a research conducted by Nicholas (2006), there is an increase in the amount of aboriginal children registered as school students. In 1994, a number of 13,200 children were registered in primary schools and in 2003, it increased to 23,087, an increase of 45%. It is clear that the Orang Asli have now realised the importance of knowledge for their children. It appears they are trying to free themselves from living a life which leads them to be lagging so far behind especially in the education aspect. Life that focuses on subsistence can be altered through a formal education. With a systematic educational system, they are able to compete with other races in this country.

This paper focuses on the Malay language proficiency among Che Wong's aborigines in Kuala Gandah, Pahang. This research also analyses the UPSR examination results of the Malay Language. It also focuses on Standard 6 Che Wong's aboriginal students in Sekolah Kebangsaan Bolok. This research is important because Malay Language is a main subject that is taught in every school in Malaysia, thus, Malay language skills need to be strengthened so that Bahasa Malaysia will stay consolidated as the official and national language (Article 152 Federal Constitution).

## RESEARCH PROBLEMS

To make sure no community lags behind in Malaysia's rapid pace of modernisation, education has become the main focus of the government. However, some Natives are

left behind in the world of education (Basir, 2008). It is undeniable that only through education, these aborigines can make some changes to their lives. One of them is the concept of lifelong learning which should be applied to every person.

The parents in particular ought to be sensitive enough of the development that is taking place and realise the importance of education for their children. They should also change their mentality and perceptions towards how important education is for the wellbeing of their children. They have to accept positive changes if they wish to make some progress in line with the current developments. Furthermore, the national education policy is always urging them to move forward.

According to Zunaida et al. (2010), the dropout rate for aboriginal people has decreased rapidly over the last 15 years; however, a whopping 80% of aboriginal children have not completed their secondary school. The percentage of attendance in schools is very low and inconsistent, thus contributing to the high level of dropouts and illiterates in the aboriginal community in general (Abdul Razaq & Zalizan, 2009). Hence, this research recommends the Malay language proficiency among Che Wong's tribe in particular. Malay Language's mastery be given attention because only by being aware of it, improvement measures can be adopted and the issue concerning dropouts can be overcome.

Therefore, this study looks into Che Wong students' UPSR achievement because UPSR is the first national examination

for primary school children in Malaysia. If at this level there are problems, then appropriate actions must be taken to ensure that the future of children would be brighter, particularly in regard to the Che Wong community.

## **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

The aim of this research is to study the Malay language proficiency of Orang Asli Che Wong's students in Sekolah Kebangsaan Bolok, Pahang Darul Makmur. Through the research, factors that contribute to the problem in mastering Malay Language among them and the measures that should be taken to improve the Malay language proficiency can be identified.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

In implementing the Malay Language proficiency's research among Orang Asli Che Wong in Kuala Gandah, Pahang as stated above, a suitable method for the research that will achieve the objective was through data collection which included observation, interview and document analysis (Mohd Majid, 2005; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2007). This research involves observation during the learning process, interviewing teachers who teach Malay Language subject to Standard 6 students, asking the aboriginal students about their opinions on Malay language proficiency especially in writing, comprehension and finally for the documents analysis, the UPSR grades of aboriginal students in writing and comprehension, from 2008 until 2012 were obtained from the school's Headmaster;

these three data collection methods- are proven to be very crucial in this research.

The usage of these three methods will complement each other, and any ambiguity can be addressed directly with the informants through the interview method and vice versa which is in turn supported by the document analysis method. The usage of those three methods is part of the triangulation process which can produce findings that are more accurate and convincing (Mohd Majid, 2005). Triangulation allows data that are unable to be collected by one method to be able to be collected using another.

### SCOPE OF RESEARCH

This study focuses on the level of Malay Language proficiency among aboriginal students in primary schools, specifically the Standard Six students. The research study was undertaken in Sekolah Kebangsaan Bolok, in Kuala Gandah, Lanchang Pahang. This school is located at the outskirts of the city. Two teachers were interviewed: one a Malay Language teacher and the other was the Head Teacher. This research depended completely on the feedback given by the respondents through the interviews and also through observations in the class.

Students' achievement in Malay Language subject in the Primary School Evaluation Test (UPSR) was also analysed. The analysis of UPSR achievement covered the period 2008 until 2012. This research also looked into the overall command of Malay Language in particular the proficiency in writing and comprehension.

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research leans on a theory which is known by its relation to acquisition and command of language, that is the theory of second language acquisition (B2) introduced by Stephen Krashen (1985). Krashen has given his theoretical perspective about the learning of the second language that has become the platform of this research, which is the hypothesis input theory. His theory of evolution began in the late 1970s, when Krashen introduced the Monitor Theory (Monitor Model), soon known as the Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis and now popularly known as the Input Hypothesis (Brown, 2007). Krashen's Input Hypothesis theory is a combination of five hypotheses based on five principles: the acquisition-learning theory, monitor hypothesis, natural order hypothesis, input hypothesis and affective effect hypothesis.

According to Krashen (1985, p. 1), acquisition is a subconscious while learning is a conscious process. Although both play a role in developing second-language competence, acquisition is far more important since the competence developed through it is responsible for generating language and thus accounting for language fluency. In his view, language learning occurs through the formal study of rules, patterns and conventions, a study which enables one to talk about and consciously apply the knowledge gained. Language acquisition, however, occurs quite differently, for it develops *exclusively*, Krashen believes, through "comprehensible input." That is, second-language students acquire language competence by exposure

to language that is both understandable and meaningful to them.

### RESEARCH FINDINGS

The explanation and discussion in this section will be based on the UPSR achievement grades of Orang Asli Che Wong students for the period 2008 until 2012. Results of the interviews will also be discussed to recognise the factor behind Orang Asli's command of Malay Language, specifically at the primary school level.

Overall, the findings indicate that Orang Asli Che Wong students showed no interest in sitting for the UPSR examination although it is an important exam for the primary school level. Orang Asli Che Wong students also do not have mastery of the Malay language as one of the important subjects in school.

The data below display the results of Orang Asli Che Wong students in the Malay language subject in the UPSR from 2008 to 2012.

#### Orang Asli Che Wong students' UPSR results in Sekolah Kebangsaan Bolok

On average, X the present research showed, based on the grades of the Orang Asli Che Wong students in the UPSR examination from 2008 to 2012, they have problems in mastering the Malay Language particularly in comprehension and writing.

Figure 1. UPSR grade A result in 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012. (Source: Research findings)

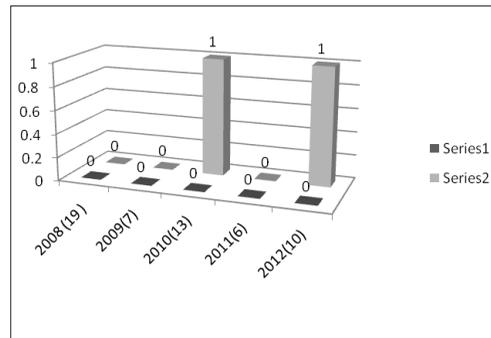


Figure 1. UPSR grade A result in 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012. (Source: Research findings)

The Figure 1 above shows the average Grade A result from the years 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012 in the Primary School Evaluation Test (UPSR) obtained by Orang Asli students, particularly the Che Wong ethnic group. The Figure shows the UPSR Grade A result for Comprehension and Writing of Che Wong aboriginal students at Sekolah Kebangsaan Bolok.

The number of Orang Asli Che Wong students who sat for the UPSR examination in 2008 was 19 but finding shows that all of those 19 students did not achieve A. The same goes for the writing part, where not even one of the entire Che Wong aboriginal students achieved grade A in that year.

In 2009, 7 Orang Asli Che Wong students registered for the Primary School Evaluation Test (UPSR) for Comprehension and Writing papers. All of those seven students did not succeed either in achieving A for both comprehension and writing papers.

In 2010, 13 candidates from Che Wong ethnic group sat for the UPSR examination.

Out of the 13 candidates, only one got A grade for Writing. As for the comprehension paper, none scored the A grade.

In the same year, the number of Orang Asli candidates who registered for the UPSR examination was six and none of them achieved the A grade for both comprehension and writing. The research finding in the 2012 shows that out of 10 registered aboriginal candidates for the UPSR examination, only one candidate from the Che Wong aboriginal community succeeded in achieving A for the writing paper. For comprehension, none out of those 10 students scored A.

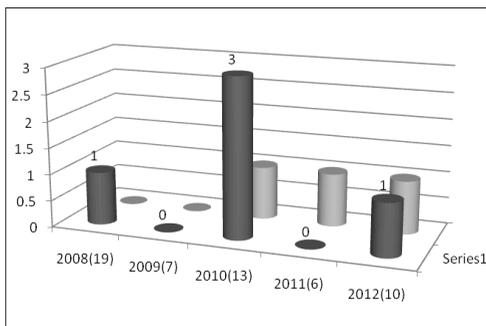


Figure 2. UPSR grade B result from the years of 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012. (Source: Research findings))

Figure 2 above shows the UPSR grade among the students from Che Wong ethnic group students in 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012. The bar graph above shows the B grade for comprehension and writing achieved by Che Wong students.

The number of Che Wong ethnic group who sat for the UPSR examination in 2008 were 19, but out of that, finding reveals that only one student managed to achieve

B grade for the comprehension paper. For the writing paper, none of the 19 students achieved B grade.

In 2009, seven candidates from the Che Wong ethnic group registered for UPSR's comprehension and writing papers. However, none of them achieved B grade for both comprehension and writing papers.

In 2010, 13 candidates from the Che Wong ethnic group registered for the UPSR examination and three of them scored B grade for comprehension. As for the writing paper, only one candidate achieved B grade. In year 2011, the total number of aboriginal students who registered for UPSR was 6 but only one of them got B grade for the writing paper. For comprehension, none of those students achieved B grade.

In 2010, from the total number of 13 Orang Asli students from Che Wong aboriginal group who registered for UPSR, three candidates scored grade B in the comprehension paper and only 1 for the writing paper. In 2011, six aboriginal students registered for UPSR, and only one of them got grade B for the writing paper and none for the comprehension paper. Findings in 2012 show that 1 out of 10 aboriginal candidates obtained grade B for the writing paper as well as for the comprehension paper in UPSR.

Based on the findings of this study, it is clear that the percentage of Orang Asli students in the Che Wong group in mastering comprehension and writing in Malay language is very low. The findings of the grade A data analysis show that from 2008 to 2012, none of the candidates scored

grade A in the comprehension paper but for the writing paper, in 2010 and 2012, 1 candidate got grade A.

The study also shows that in 2008, 1 candidate out of 19 got grade B for the comprehension paper. In 2010, the number of students who obtained the B grade was 3 out of 13 candidates. In 2012, there were a total of 10 Orang Asli candidates from the Orang Asli Che Wong group who got grade B for the comprehension paper. Meanwhile, for the writing paper between the year 2008-2012, only one candidate succeeded in scoring grade B from the year 2010, 2011 and 2012.

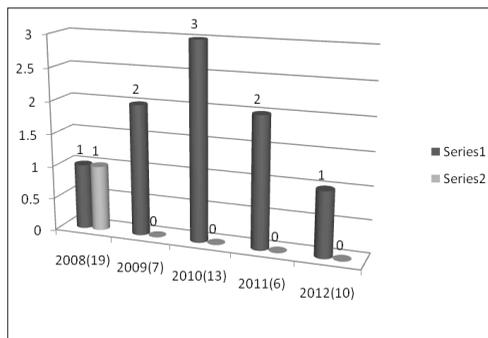


Figure 3. UPSR grade C result from the years 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012. (Source: Research findings)

The bar chart above (Figure 3) shows the number of aboriginal candidates who got grade C in UPSR. This graph shows the average of students who got grade C from the 2008 to 2012. The vertical lines indicate the number of Orang Asli candidates who got grade C in UPSR while the horizontal lines indicate the year in which the students sat for UPSR. Meanwhile, the bars in

red and blue show the number of Orang Asli candidates who scored grade C in comprehension and writing papers in UPSR in the period covered in this research (2008-2012).

In 2008, only 1 Orang Asli candidate from Che Wong aboriginals scored grade C in UPSR for both comprehension and writing papers out of the 19 candidates who sat for the same exam.

In 2009, a total of 7 Orang Asli students registered as candidates in UPSR but not all of them sat for the examination. All the Orang Asli students who sat for the UPSR failed to get even grade C for the writing paper. However, there was an increase of 2 more candidates who obtained grade C for the comprehension paper.

In 2010, 13 Orang Asli Che Wong students registered for UPSR. Findings indicate a similar pattern in 2009 in terms of grades obtained by Orang Asli Che Wong candidates in the UPSR comprehension paper; in 2010, none of them who sat for UPSR scored grade C. However, for the comprehension paper, the graph shows an increase of 3 candidates who obtained grade C.

In 2011, the graph shows that the number of Orang Asli Che Wong students who scored grade C in the UPSR writing paper is the same from 2009 to 2011. For this year, a total of 6 Orang Asli Che Wong candidates registered for UPSR. The grade C graph displays the results of Orang Asli Che Wong students that had decreased from three in 2010 to 2 students. This is likely

due to the fact that only a small number of students registered for the examination compared with the other years.

In 2012, a total of 10 Orang Asli Che Wong students registered, but none of them obtained grade C in the writing paper. No changes are seen when the results are compared from 2009 to 2012. Meanwhile, for 2012, the graph for the comprehension paper shows that the number of Orang Asli Che Wong students who obtained grade C had dropped from 2 in 2011 to only 1 student.

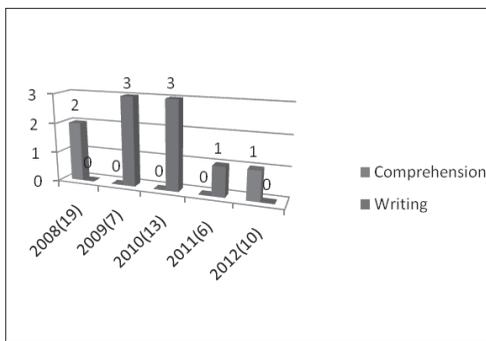


Figure 4. UPSR grade D result from year 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012. (Source: Research findings)

Figure 4 shows the average in terms of candidates who obtained grade D from 2008 to 2012. This study shows the number of Orang Asli Che Wong candidates who scored grade D in UPSR. From 19 students who registered, none of them obtained grade D for the writing paper while 2 of them scored grade D for the comprehension paper.

Practically, scores obtained in 2009 was the same as the previous year, where none of the candidates obtained grade D

for the comprehension paper. However, the number of students registered in year 2009 was only 7 which was significantly lower than in 2008. The result in 2009 showed no improvement for the comprehension paper. Even so, the year 2009 had shown an increase in the number of people passing the writing paper where there were 3 candidates from the Orang Asli Che Wong group who obtained grade D compared with 2008.

In the year 2010, 13 Orang Asli Che Wong students registered for UPSR. Even though the number of registered students had increased from the previous year, the result showed that none of them scored grade D for the comprehension paper. Meanwhile in the writing paper, three candidates obtained grade D, similar to the 2009 results.

In 2011, a total of six Orang Asli students from the Che Wong group registered for UPSR. None of them obtained grade D for the comprehension paper. These results had shown the same pattern for three consecutive years. Although there were candidates who scored grade D for the writing paper, the graph showed a decline in the number as only one candidate obtained grade D compared with 2009 and 2010 where there were three candidates who scored grade D.

In 2012, a total of 10 Orang Asli Che Wong students registered for UPSR, but none of them obtained grade D for the writing paper. This graph shows the decline in the number of candidates who got scored D in 2011 from 1 to 0 in the UPSR writing paper. For the comprehension paper, the result shows that only one candidate

obtained grade D. Despite this, it still shows a growing number of students from the previous year.

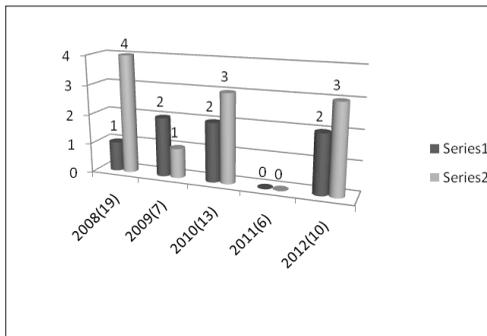


Figure 5. UPSR grade E result from year 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012. (Source: Research findings)

Figure 5 above shows the number of Orang Asli Che Wong students, who earned grade E in the UPSR from 2008 to 2012 for the Malay Language paper of Comprehension and Writing. The graph indicates uneven grade patterns for both the Malay Language papers.

In 2008, a number of Orang Asli Che Wong's students had registered to sit for the UPSR examination. From 19 students enrolled, one student obtained grade E in the Malay Language Comprehension Paper and four students scored grade E in the Malay Language Writing paper. Meanwhile in 2009, a total of seven Orang Asli Che Wong students enrolled for the UPSR examination. Of those enrolled, a total of two students obtained grade E in the Malay Language Comprehension paper while another scored got grade E in the Malay Language Writing paper.

Thirteen Orang Asli Che Wong students had registered to sit for the UPSR in 2010.

For the Comprehension paper of the Malay Language, 2 students obtained grade E and 3 others could only manage grade E in Malay Language Writing paper. Next, only 6 Orang Asli Che Wong students were enrolled to sit for UPSR in 2011. During that year, none of the students obtained grade E on the Malay Language Comprehension or Writing paper. In 2012, a total of 10 Orang Asli Che Wong students registered for the UPSR examination.

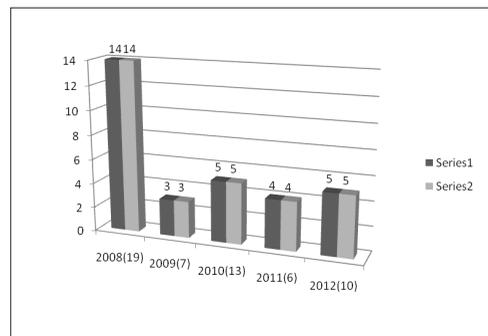


Figure 6. UPSR absentees from year 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012. (Source: Research findings)

The chart in Figure 6 above shows the number of Orang Asli Che Wong students who were not present for the UPSR, or particularly for Malay Language Comprehension and Writing. In 2008, out of 19 students who registered for the UPSR examination, about 14 students were absent the day the Malay Language Comprehension and Writing papers were scheduled. The total number of absentees during that year was higher compared with the number of students who registered.

In 2009, three out of seven students were not present to take both Writing and Comprehension papers under the Malay

Language subject. The total of number of absentees was nearly half of those who had registered. The number of absentees during the UPSR examination in 2010 were 5 out of 13 registered students. The total number of absentees was smaller than it was in the previous years. Those who were absent did not register for both Malay Language papers.

In 2011, from a total of six students enrolled, it can be said that the majority of Orang Asli Che Wong students did not attend the examination or specifically sat for the Writing and Comprehension papers, except for four students. The total number of registered students in 2011 decreased compared with the previous years and the number of absentees also increased.

In 2012, half of the total number of Orang Asli Che Wong's students who enrolled for the UPSR did not turn up for the examination of both the Malay Language papers. The total number of registered students was 10 but five students were absent on the day of the examination. Although 50% of the students who did not sit for the examination is considered a large number, it was still lower in total compared with 2011.

### **FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE POOR COMMAND OF MALAY LANGUAGE AMONG THE ORANG ASLI CHE WONG STUDENTS**

Based on the interviews conducted with the Malay Language teachers at Sekolah Kebangsaan Bolok, researchers identified several factors that contributed to the poor

command of the Malay Language among students of Orang Asli Che Wong at the school.

### **Environmental Factors**

The Orang Asli communities of Che Wong have their own native language, known as the Che Wong language. Pupils enjoy using their native language when speaking with their peers who are also indigenous peoples of the Che Wong tribe. They seldom use the Malay Language when speaking with each other unless they are reprimanded and instructed to do so by the teacher. Malay is a second language for them and even then they only use it in the classroom. The Malay language used is also not formal in nature or rather, colloquial. Thus, the educational achievement of Orang Asli Che Wong students, especially in the Malay language subject, is becoming weaker. These students should be exposed more to the use of the Malay language even among their own people.

At home they speak to family members or neighbours using the language of Che Wong. Thus, the influence of the daily usage of their native language has weakened their ability to master the Malay Language which in turn affects the level of command of Malay Language among indigenous students, especially in terms of writing. According to the Malay Language teachers interviewed, Orang Asli Che Wong students also prefer to use simple vocabulary that is understood by them alone. Their constructed essays also tend to be more colloquial.

They also rarely use Malay words for example, the word 'memberikan' (giving), 'menggalakkan' (encouraging) and many others.

In addition, the Orang Asli Che Wong students also have trouble understanding comprehension questions as there are some Malay words that are difficult for them, for example, 'menjerang air' and 'menuai padi'. For indigenous people of the Che Wong tribe, they simply use the word 'masak' to describe the food being cooked, 'masak nasi' and 'masak air'. Whereas in Malay, there is other terms used to describe activities such as 'masak air', as in 'menjerang air'. This is confusing for Orang Asli Che Wong students because they do not understand the word. This could be because the words are not used in everyday situations at home.

### **Culture of Learning**

The findings from the interviews also show that the indigenous students do not master the Malay Language well due to the learning culture. Their learning process only occurs in the class and when they return home, they are less motivated to do their homework or to study. Often, the homework given by the teachers is not completed. Parents often do not show enough attention and are less concerned about the education of their children. This has adversely affected the students' studies and made it more difficult for them to master the lessons taught by teachers and subsequently, it affected their proficiency in Malay Language.

### **STEPS TO IMPROVE STUDENT PROFICIENCY IN MALAY LANGUAGE AMONG ORANG ASLI CHE WONG STUDENTS**

Teachers who teach Malay Language at the school were interviewed to find out about the relevant measures taken by the school to improve indigenous students' mastery of the Malay Language. Among them is by holding extra classes after school hours. Through these classes, teachers were able to identify the students' problem areas or skills and assist them. This is in line with what was mentioned by Krashen (1985) when he stated that a teacher can promote acquisition of language by providing students with appropriate comprehensible input. The only alternative procedure for language teachers that he describes is that of presenting students with a rule and then helping them practice applying it, a procedure which inevitably leads to learning.

The Malay Language teachers also conducted drills related to the UPSR past year questions in the classroom to help students understand the types of questions that will be asked, where the teachers discussed the answers with the Orang Asli Che Wong tribe students in the classroom. The school also attempted to obtain some cooperation from the children's parents as well as trying to convey information on the importance of learning to the parents. However, the responses of the students and parents were limited. Parents did not show much determination to ensure their children attend classes and drills conducted by the teacher.

Through interviews and observations during a study session in Sekolah Kebangsaan Balok, based on the process of learning a second language (L2) and the native language (L1) among students of Orang Asli Che Wong tribe, learning Malay language in schools is not the case, as suggested by Krashen through the principles contained in his Monitor theory. This is because the hypothesis does not provide significant implications on the teaching of the language because the assumption is that in order to understand a language, what should prevail is communication. The communication expected among students on learning the spoken language does not occur. The students do not use the Malay language, especially when communicating at home.

## CONCLUSION

The study was conducted to explore the major issues faced by Orang Asli Che Wong students associated with the level of learning, understanding and writing in Malay Language. This was considered a measure to create a literate and knowledgeable society with close reference to the Orang Asli Che Wong students in Sekolah Kebangsaan Bolok, Pahang.

The findings show that the language proficiency of Orang Asli Che Wong students in Malay Language, as evidence in their performance in the UPSR, is still very weak. Research shows that students' skill and proficiency levels do not match with the level of education they receive.

Skills at a basic level also show a low level of mastery. If the student continues his or her education to high school with a lack of proficiency in the Malay Language, of course more complex problems will arise in the effort to master the Malay Language well. The issue of dropouts in education is likely to continue if the level of proficiency in Malay Language is not addressed because it is fundamental to understand the subjects being taught. Therefore, the level of the Malay Language proficiency among Orang Asli Che Wong students must be improved to achieve the goal of developing this group.

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