

# Project Progress Report

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## Details of Project

Project number	:	GL/F06/KTS/2020
Project title	:	Study on Coping Strategies of Non-Chinese Students and Families in Chinese Primary Schools in Sarawak
Project duration	:	1 Jan 2020 – 31 Dec 2021
Project team	:	Advisor: Datuk David Teng (President of Sarawak Culture Research Institute Society) Team members: 1) Dr Elena Chai (FSSK, Unimas) 2) Professor Dr Wang Yin Chai (FSKTM, Unimas) 3) Dr Siti Mariam binti Abdullah (FSKPM, Unimas) 4) Dr Florianna Lendai anak Michael Mulok (FSKPM, Unimas) 5) Dr Lee Jun Choi (FSKTM, Unimas) 6) Dr Ngu Sze Song (FK, Unimas) 7) Encik Awang Ideris Bin Awang Daud (FSSK, Unimas)

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## Project Activities

### Preparation stage

Meetings were held with team members on 17, 18 and 23 Dec 2019 to discuss on project brief, objectives, methods, etc. The project will commence officially in January 2020, as stated in the *Memo Pendaftaran Geran* by Research Innovation and Enterprise Center (RIEC) (ref: UNIMAS/TNC(PI)-04.01/09-07.02 Jld.4 (32))

Association of the Boards of Management of Aided Chinese Primary Schools in Kuching, Samarahan and Serian Divisions invited the team to “校长与老师培训管” (Principal and Teachers training camp) on 11 Jan 2020 held at SJKC no. 4 Sessions include latest teaching methods such as the Satir transformational therapy approach and a sharing session on “如何克服在华小教导土著生分享会” (Over coming difficulties and challenges in teaching non-Chinese students in Chinese Primary Schools) by principals from SJKC Padawan (十哩中华公学丘小洲校长), SJKC Chung Hua Stapok (尖山中华公学杨淶堡校长) and SJKC Batu Kitang (峇都吉东中华公学方都儿校长).

Topics during the sharing session include challenges faced by : (i) Type A<sup>1</sup> school with substantive number of non-Chinese students (ii) Type SKM school with majority of non-Chinese students. The problems faced by the schools are different and the challenges to overcome differ significantly as well. This training camp helped the project team to have a better understanding about the Chinese school environment and also to form contacts with fellow principals and teachers at the training camp.

Four sets of instruments were developed for different stakeholders, namely Principal, Teacher, Student and Parent. A group meeting was held on 30 Jan 2020 at Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities to formally discuss and improve on the instruments. The instruments were then tested in a pilot study held in SJKC Sematan on 26 February 2020.

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<sup>1</sup> Type A is school with more than 800 students. Type B is school with 150 to 800 students. School with less than 150 students is categorized as Sekolah Kurang Murid (SKM). However, the last exercise in school classification was conducted over 10 years ago. Some schools have significant increase or decrease in student population but the classification remains the same and has not been updated by the Ministry of Education.

Principal Ong was most forthcoming with our inquiries and helped us to better understand SJKC school system.

Formal approval was obtained from Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia on 10 June 2020 (Ref:KPM.600-3/2/3-eras(7376)) and from Sarawak Education Department on 11 June 2020 (Ref: JPNSW.SKPP.LAT.600-1/1/1 Jld.7 (43)). Both approvals denote permission for data collection in all SJKC in Sarawak from 3 August 2020 until 4 January 2021.

### **Data collection stage**

Interviews with teachers, students and parents were conducted at SJKC Sematan from 12 until 14 March 2020. A total of 10 teachers, 43 students and 26 parents were interviewed face-to-face. Home visits were made to interview parents who live in villages around Sematan town.

Fieldwork was conducted in Meradong and Sarikei from September until October 2020. The team visited and conducted interviews in four schools of Meradong and two schools in Sarikei. namely SJKC Chung Hein (泗理街群賢學校), SJKC San Ming (泗理街三民小學), SJKC Kai Sing (馬拉端開新學校), SJKC Kung Cheng (馬拉端公正小學), SJKC Nan Chiew (馬拉端南橋學校), SJKC Min Daik (馬拉端民哲學校). The schools were shortlisted for the project study based on the higher percentage of non-Chinese students as compared to other schools in Sarikei division. The school list was agreed upon after discussion with Meradong YB Ding Kuong Hiing's office. The list was also presented to Pegawai Pendidikan of Sarikei, Pegawai Pendidikan of Meradong and Pegawai Pendidikan of Julau. Team leader approached all school principals to brief principals on the purpose of the study and the nature of the interview method with teachers, students and parents. All principals were very cooperative and helpful with the project's data collection.

	<b>School</b>	<b>Teachers</b>	<b>Students</b>	<b>Parents</b>
1	SJKC Chung Hein	12	39	17
2	SJKC San Ming	11	28	18
3	SJKC Kai Sing	10	41	28

4	SJKC Kung Cheng	11	33	28
5	SJKC Nan Chiew	11	11	15
6	SJKC Min Daik	17	32	25
	Total	72	184	131

Table 1: Number of respondents for SJKC in Sarikei and Meradong Districts

After the Movement Control Order was relaxed and the covid situation is in better control, the team conducted fieldwork at SJKC Tambirat in 14-21 October 2020. A total of 9 teachers, 40 students and 7 parents were interviewed face-to-face. Parents were invited to school during recess time to meet the team to talk about their experience, thoughts about their children's school performance and wellbeing.

Total number of respondents interviewed from March 2020 to October 2020 from eight schools are shown in Table 2.

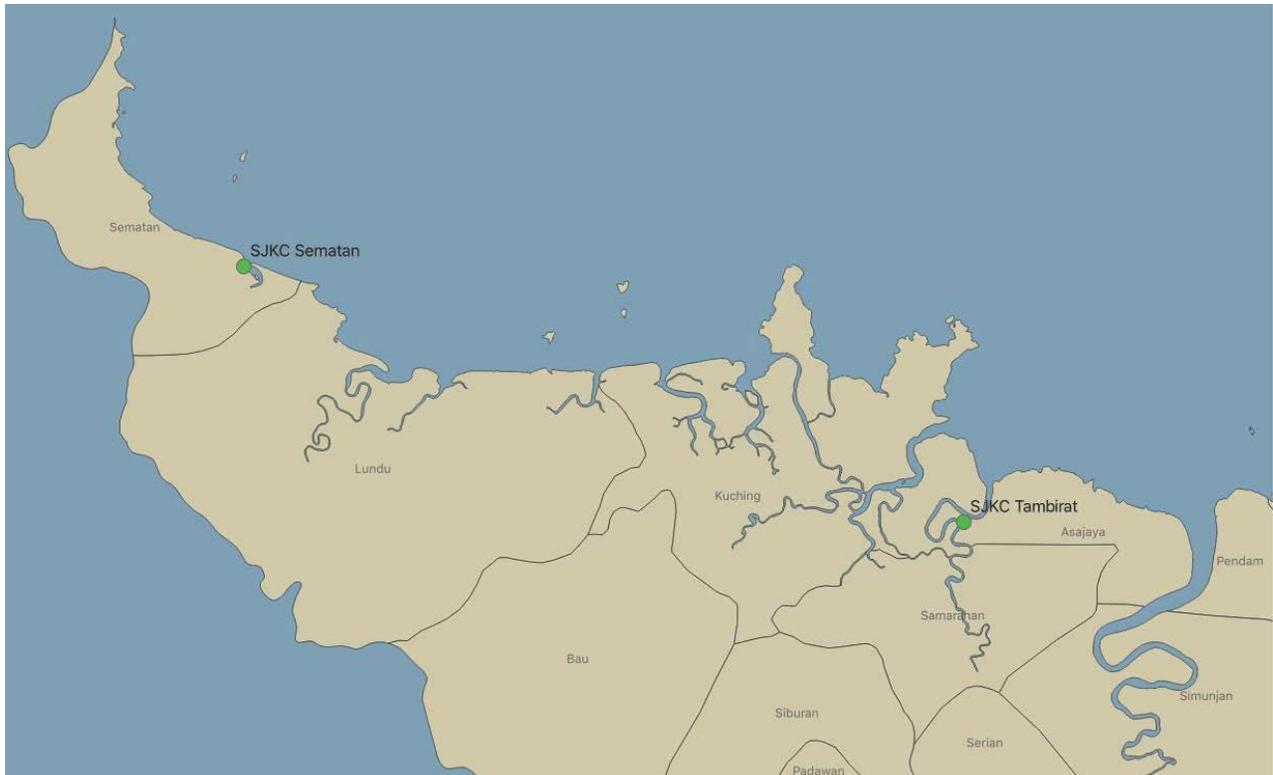
	Teachers	Students	Parents
Total number	91	267	164

Table 2: Total number of respondents from eight SJKCs in Sematan, Tambirat, Sarikei and Meradong districts

## Preliminary Analysis

The preliminary analysis for this study is based on the data collected from eight semi rural Chinese Primary Schools (SJKC) in Kuching Samarahan division and Sarikei division. The schools are SJKC Sematan, SJKC Tambirat, SJKC Chung Hien, SJKC San Min, SJKC Kai Sing, SJKC Kung Cheng, SJKC Nan Chiew and SJKC Min Daik. The location of the schools are shown in Map 1 and Map 2. SJKC Sematan is located in the Sematan sub-district of

Kuching division while SJKC Tambirat is located in Asajaya district of Samarahan division. Both schools are members of the Association of the Boards of Management of Aided Chinese Primary Schools in Kuching, Samarahan and Serian Divisions (晋汉连省津贴华小董联会)..



Map 1: SJKC Sematan and SJKC Tambirat of Kuching Division



Map 2 : Schools visited in Sarikei Division

The schools in Sarikei district of Sarikei division are SJKC Chung Hien and SJKC San Min. The other four schools are located in Meradong district of Sarikei division, namely SJKC Kai Sing, SJKC Kung Cheng, SJKC Nan Chiew and SJKC Min Daik. All five schools except SJKC Chung Hien<sup>2</sup> in Sarikei are members of the Association of the Boards of Management of Aided Chinese Primary Schools in Sarikei Division (泗里街省津貼華小董联会).

The analysis is presented firstly by school and thereafter summarized from all data collected from the eight schools.

#### **i) SJKC Chung Hua Sematan 三馬丹中華公學**

SJKC Sematan was founded in 1946 by accomplished local businessmen namely Mr Ang Mu Qian, Mr Goh Kian Yu. Before the school was built, the Chinese community in Sematan sent their children for education in Kuching. As the trip to and from Kuching was arduous, the community decided to build their own school. The initial school premise was located on the top floor of a shophouse, Chop Teck Fa. The shop belonged to Goh Kian Yu. In 1949, the colonial government gave a piece of land for the purpose of school building. The 2.08 acre of land is where the present school stands. In 1975, the school started to enroll non-Chinese students as the number of local Chinese students dwindled. The total enrollment of students was 60 in that year and classes were divided to 3 and teaching staff increased from 1 to 2, and thereafter to 5 in 1984. The school went through several renovation to accommodate the growing number of students. In 1987 a new single storey building with 3 classrooms and an office was built.

The present principal is Principal Ong Siew Ping. The school is categorized as a Grade B school<sup>3</sup>. There are currently 117 students in the Perdana classes (Primary 1 to 6)<sup>4</sup> with 96 non-Chinese students and 22 Chinese students. The non-Chinese students are made up of five ethnicities namely Malay, Iban, Bidayuh, Melanau and Murut. Malay students are the most numerous (63 students), followed by 21 Bidayuh students, 7 Iban students,

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<sup>2</sup> SJKC Chung Hien is a fully government aided Chinese primary school. The school doesn't have a school management board (校董).

<sup>3</sup> School with 150-800 students

<sup>4</sup> There are 24 students in pre school of SJKC Chung Hua Sematan.

2 Murut students and 1 Melanau student. There is a Primary 3 student who traces her root to neighbouring country and identified her ethnicity as Indonesian ethnicity<sup>5</sup>. The number of teachers is 16. The school has a rendition of activities which emphasize cultural diversity among its students. Celebrations such as Chinese New Year, Hari Raya, Hari Gawai, Mooncake festival, Rice dumpling festival are organized with active participation from parents and local community. Most of the board of management are local businessmen in Sematan and they show strong support in the activities and planning of the school. A new library recently completed, and it was built and sponsored by a local developer.

School Year	Number of students	Number of Chinese students	Number of non-Chinese students
1	29	3	26
2	19	5	14
3	19	3	16
4	20	5	15
5	16	2	14
6	14	4	10
Total	117	22	95 (81%)

Table 3: Number of students in SJKC Chung Hua Sematan

#### ii) SJKC Chung Hua Tambirat 端必臘中華公學

SJKC Tambirat found its root as Min Zhi School (民志學校) which was located at Tanjong Apong. The school was established in 1921 by Mr Yang Xie Bao and Mr Yang Chang He. At Tanjong Apong, Min Zhi School operated for 2 years with about 8 students. In 1931, the school was reopened and renamed as Chung Hua School (中華學校) with an enrollment of 20 students. The school was closed during Japanese Occupation and during its reopening in 1945, there was about 40 students with 3 classes. By 1947, students number exceeded 50. The school was rebuilt in 1950 with a stilted wooden

<sup>5</sup> Her nationality is Malaysian.

design on a land of 2 acres donated by Mr Chai Ko Nam. The name of Tambirat Chung Hua School was officially used that year. In 1953, students number exceed 100 but the number dwindled due to outward migration of local population in 1970s. A new school building with 3 classrooms was built in 1984.

SJKC Chung Hua Tambirat is under the leadership of Principal Jong Chiew Kee. Principal Jong has led and manage the school for 11 years. There are 12 teachers and 56 students in the Perdana classes (Primary 1 – 6)<sup>6</sup>. Majority of the students are of Malay ethnic (47 students or 84%) and there are only 9 Chinese students. Almost all the students from the school will proceed to SMK Hajjah Laila Taib located about 8 km away. The school is selected as one of the participating schools for Highly Immersive English Program (HIP). One of the activities for HIP is students and teachers write and paint the school building and compounds with English nouns and verbs. Through such activity, it is hoped that students will have more interest in learning the language and acquire better competency in English. The school also organizes many festival related events such as mooncake making class, making of lion head for Chinese New Year celebration and Hari Raya festival to expose students from Malay and Chinese background to understand and appreciate each other’s traditional practices. The board of management and parents are supportive in all the activities organized.

School Year	Number of students	Number of Chinese students	Number of non-Chinese students
1	9	1	8
2	10	2	8
3	7	1	6
4	11	2	9
5	11	2	9
6	8	1	7
Total	56	9	47 (84%)

Table 4: Number of students in SJKC Chung Hua Tambirat, Asajaya

<sup>6</sup> There are 21 pre schoolers in SJKC Chung Hua Tambirat.

### iii) SJKC Chung Hien 群贤學校

Before 1953, there was no school for the Chinese community in Bayong. Most of the local sent their children to nearby Su Lok Chinese school located in lower reach of Sungai Bayong. It took the parents and student one and a half hour boat trip to reach the school each day. The community then decided to build their own school. Under the initiative of founding members, Mr Ling Chuan Fa, Mr Zhang Tiao, Mr Yu Biao, Mr Yu Zhao Wen and Mr Yu Yu Yun the school was built in 1953 nearby the location of SK Udin. The school was rebuilt and relocated to its present location in 1965 with three classrooms on a stilted building. Road access to the school was possible in 1983.

The present principal of SJKC Chung Hien is Principal Lei Ko Kien<sup>7</sup>. There are 13 teachers and 69 students in Perdana classes (Primary 1-6)<sup>8</sup>. The ethnicity of the students is made up of 31 Chinese, 34 Iban and 2 Malay. SJKC Chung Hien is a fully government aided school. This school is the only fully aided school among all 8 school the team visited. The school is located right next to Sungai Sarikei and far from the main Jakar-Sarikei- Sibul road. Phone connectivity is weak and almost no internet connection at the school. There is a nice garden in the school for recreational purpose. Students and teachers work together to maintain the garden. The Parents and Teachers Association (PTA) has recently planted 150 pineapple fruits in front of the school compound. The pineapple planting project is organized to forge a better understanding between parents and teachers, and also serves a revenue for school activities.

School Year	Number of students	Number of Chinese students	Number of non-Chinese students
1	13	4	9
2	11	5	6
3	13	3	10
4	6	3	3

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<sup>7</sup> Principal Lei is the chairman for Sarikei Chinese School Teachers Association (泗里街华小教师公会)

<sup>8</sup> SJKC Chung Hien has 17 pre school students

5	9	5	4
6	17	11	6
Total	69	31	36 (52%)

Table 5: Number of students in SJKC Chung Hien, Sarikei

#### iv) SJKC San Min 三民小學

The school was founded in the early 1940s and operated at the house of Mr Leong Chii. The class was under the guidance of Mr Wong King Sing. Later on the class was moved to a motorboat workshop due to space constraint. Under the initiative and commitment of Mr Chan Lok, Mr Long Pau and Mr Ee Fu, a wooden school with attap roof was built. The school enrollment was about 30 students. In 1948, the school was named as SRB San Ming by teacher Mr Lee Hee Siung. The name San Ming means the three ethnic groups in the area (Chinese, Iban and Malay). In 1962, the old school building was replaced with a new concrete building made up of 3 classrooms and a staffroom.

Principal Hii How Shuay is the current principal and he is assisted by 12 teaching staff. There are currently 56 students in the Perdana classes (Primary 1 to 6)<sup>9</sup> with 32 non-Chinese students and 24 Chinese students. All but one<sup>10</sup> non-Chinese students is from Iban ethnic background. SJKC San Min is a highly technological savvy school. The school under the leadership of Principal Hii How Shuay has undergone great changes. All classrooms are air-conditioned. Teaching are conducted using LED projector and laptop. Teachers are equipped with speech assistance device such as microphones worn on neck and lavalier mic (pinned on collar or shirt). The school is considered as a SKM (Sekolah Kurang Murid) with student number of 56<sup>11</sup>. School activities, beautification, upgrading projects are mainly organized and managed by the School Board of Management. The Parents and Teachers Association (PIBG) is also active in the participation of school activities. SJKC San Min is wellknown for its archery team. The school team has represented Sarikei to state level competitions.

<sup>9</sup> There are 11 pre schoolers in SJKC San Ming.

<sup>10</sup> Kadazan ethnicity

<sup>11</sup> This number excludes 11 preschool students.

School Year	Number of students	Number of Chinese students	Number of non-Chinese students
1	11	1	10
2	10	3	7
3	10	6	4
4	7	6	1
5	9	4	5
6	9	4	5
Total	56	24	32 (57%)

Table 6: Number of students in SJKC San Min, Sarikei

#### v) SJKC Kai Sing 开新學校

Located at Sungai Labas, the school was established in 1951. The 0.59 acre land was donated by the school founder, Mr Lee Boon Chiong. In 1957 the old attap roof school was upgraded to zinc roof. The building sustained for another 30 years before a concrete school building was constructed with special “Emergency Allocation” approved by the Education Department. With the help and support of School Board, parents, local community, the new school building provided comfort and better learning environment for the children. The school is among the first in Meradong district with a sheltered sports stadium. In 2001, YB Dato Law Hieng Ding and YB Dato Ting Chek Sii together with the School Board, parents and local community collected funding to construct a double storey school building.

SJKC Kai Sing is presently led by Principal Ong Yi Ting and the school has 12 teachers. There are six classes, one for each school year. The total number of students is 53<sup>12</sup> and the number of non-Chinese students stands at 44 (83%). All the non-Chinese students are from Iban ethnicity. The Parents and Teachers Association (PIBG) was established two years ago. Many of the PIBG committee members are alumni or known as ‘mothers of 2<sup>nd</sup> generation non-Chinese students’.

<sup>12</sup> Pre-school students is 25 with 19 Iban students and 6 Chinese students.

School Year	Number of students	Number of Chinese students	Number of non-Chinese students
1	12	0	12
2	14	3	11
3	6	1	5
4	11	2	9
5	6	2	4
6	4	1	3
Total	53	9	44 (83%)

Table 7: Number of students in SJKC Kai Sing, Meradong

#### vi) SJKC Kung Cheng 公正小學

Before 1951 parents sent their children to Kai Ming Chinese school located 3.5 km away. The only access between the local community and outside was through a mud road. It is the only road access for local farmers to transport their agricultural products to Bintangor. However, the road is not accessible throughout the year. During rainy season, the road was always submerged and the local are cut off from the outside world. The road inaccessibility has hampered the children from attending school and this has caused concern among the community. In 1951, under the initiative of Mr Tang Hui Ching a single storey wooden building comprised of two classrooms and a staffroom was built. In 1984 another building was added to facilitate the increasing student's enrollment. A double storey concrete building was built in 2005.

There are 12 teachers under the lead of Principal Chiew Hua Kin. The total number of students is 47 for the Perdana classes (Primary 1-6)<sup>13</sup>. From the total number of students, 66% are non-Chinese students with a majority of Iban students (30 Iban students and a Bidayuh student).

<sup>13</sup> Pre schooler in SJKC Kung Cheng account to 12 students.

The School Management is active in organizing activities. Annually six activities such as *gotong royong*, sports, Chinese New Year and Gawai celebration, *Majlis Penyampaian Hadiah* and *keceriaan sekolah*. The Parents and Teachers Association (PIBG) is also actively involved in the school activities. Many of the PIBG members are the school's alumni. These parents, mostly mothers are also of non-Chinese background.

School Year	Number of students	Number of Chinese students	Number of non-Chinese students
1	9	2	7
2	13	6	7
3	8	3	5
4	9	1	8
5	5	2	3
6	3	2	1
Total	47	16	31 (66%)

Table 8: Number of students in SJKC Kung Cheng, Meradong

#### vii) SJKC Nan Chiew 南桥學校

In the mid 1940s school children living nearby Sungai Meradong had to travel 4 km daily to Min Tee Chinese school. Local pioneers such as Mr Tang Ing Mu, Mr Lau Tang Kian, Mr Yong Chik Huai, Mr Yek Chiong Luk and Mr Yong Yu Nam decided to build a school for their future generation. Under the lead of Mr Lau Tang Kian, an application was submitted through a Methodist church in Sarikei to the Education Department. However, the application for setting a school was not approved. The five pioneers then submitted their school establishment application through a Catholic leader. With the help of the Catholic leader, the application was successfully granted by the authority. By the end of 1945, the community have their very own school. The first batch of students consisted of 15 children under the guidance of a teacher.

Principal Ting Yew Sang is the present principal of SJKC Nan Chiew. There are 13 teaching staff and 42 students in total. The number of non-Chinese students is 13 or 31% out of total student population. All but one of the non-Chinese students is a Malay student and the rest are Iban students. The School Management Board meet according to the needs of the school. They have recently embellished the school building and school landscape with new paints, curtains and Bucidol trees. The Parents Teachers Association (PIBG) was established in 2012 and organize 3 meetings a year. There is also a school alumni that help to organize activities to forge networks between the school, students, parents and the alumni.

School Year	Number of students	Number of Chinese students	Number of non-Chinese students
1	7	4	3
2	8	6	2
3	8	8	0
4	3	2	1
5	4	1	3
6	12	8	4
Total	42	29	13 (31%)

Table 9: Number of students in SJKC Nan Chiew, Meradong

#### viii) SJKC Min Daik 民哲學校

In the late 1920s, the first pioneering group consisting of about 40 families moved into the area and cleared the forested land. Many of them are Christians. As they became more settled in the area as agriculturalists, they proposed to have a school built for the wellbeing of their future generations. The first building of 2 classrooms was established in 1928 with 12 students. Before the war, students number was 50 in 1941. After the war, number of students was 83 and the school experienced insufficient space for teaching and learning purposes. The school seek help from Min Kwong Methodist Church for the usage of their premise as temporary classrooms. In 1953, students number escalated to

240 and the school board of management seek assistance from the ministry of education in expanding the number of classrooms.

In 1979, the director of the school board, Mr Gong Yan Gong bought a 5 acres land and expanded the school compound. The school boasted an enrollment of 400 students in the 1980s and new structure with 4 classrooms was built together with other infrastructures such as toilets, parking lot, badminton court and basketball court.

SJKC Min Daik is currently under the guidance and leadership of Principal Fung Gan Fung. There are 19 teachers and 107 Perdana class students (Primary 1-6) and 10 pre school students. The school is the largest in student size among all schools visited in Sarikei and Meradong districts. It is a Grade A school which has more than students' number of 400. Majority of the students are Chinese children living nearby. There are only 35 (32.7%) of non-Chinese students with the majority of Iban (28), Bidayuh (1), Melanau (2), Kadazan (1), Dusun (1) and others (2)<sup>14</sup>.

SJKC Min Daik is the only school visited in Meradong district without the establishment of Parents Teachers Association. The School Management board meets four times a year. The school has one of the most established sports facilities with indoor basketball court and the sports team have bagged many prizes in inter district, inter division meets. The school compound is also vibrant with colourful decorations and well maintained green landscape.

<b>School Year</b>	<b>Number of students</b>	<b>Number of Chinese students</b>	<b>Number of non-Chinese students</b>
1	17	14	3
2	22	14	8
3	18	12	6
4	18	9	9

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<sup>14</sup> One student with Phillipine nationality and another student without proper certification (Pelajar tanpa dokumen lengkap).

5	11	8	3
6	21	15	6
Total	107	72	35 (32.7%)

Table 10: Number of students in SJKC Min Daik, Meradong

## Teaching Learning Support at School

### Class Allocation

As most classes have majority of non-Chinese students, the preferred method for class distribution is for the teachers to ‘follow through’ the students’ learning journey from Primary 1 to Primary 6. The same group of teachers in Primary 1 will be teaching the same group of students in Primary 2 and in subsequent primaries. A Chinese language teacher will teach a non-Chinese student from Primary 1 until he/she graduates. The same goes for teachers of other subjects. This method is considered efficient for classes with majority non-Chinese students because teachers will be able to monitor the process of the students carefully.

However, a few principals are of the opinion that the method of allocating classes by teachers’ expertise is more appropriate. This method is different from the ‘follow through’ whereby a Maths teacher will be focusing on teaching her expert subjects to classes assigned. As most of the schools visited are Sekolah Kurang Murid, the number of teachers are also small. Most expert teachers will be teaching their core subjects to all classes. For example, from the 12 or 13 teachers in the school there is usually one or the most two teachers who are expert in certain subject. A Maths teacher will most likely be teaching Maths to all classes ranging from Primary 1 to Primary 6. However most teachers in SJKC are majoring in Chinese language and not all will be allocated to teach their major. Many are allocated to teach their minor subjects. This does not pose as an obstruction to the delivery of efficient teaching and learning process. A teacher can be expert in the subject matter through experience. This method of assigning ‘expertise’ or ‘minor expertise’ for classes is considered favourable for better academic performance as the expert teachers can focus in teaching, coaching the students to attain better results, particularly the UPSR exam.

## **Transitional Week**

For Primary one students, the Ministry of Education has developed a compulsory program known as 'Minggu Transisi' or 'Transitional Week' for all primary schools in the country. The program is for a period of three weeks from the first day of the school year. It is held to help the year one students to adapt to the changes from informal education to formal environment. In its through this program that SJKC try to incorporate some of its school culture to the new students. For example, when to greet teachers, how to arrange tables, chairs, what to do in the school canteen, how to ask for permission to go to washroom, what to do to keep washroom clean and dry, etc. The three-week programs is subject to the respective school's planning and arrangement. Some schools invite parents to participate in simple 'get to know the school' activity, 'sing along' activity, and others. Parents of non-Chinese students are exposed to the school culture and environment through these activities. Principals and teachers consider the cooperation and commitment of parents as very crucial in ensuring their children's successful coping in a new environment. A good start with parents' understanding and support will render non-Chinese students better adaptation with the new school.

## **Tuition classes**

All the eight SJKCs conduct tuition or extra classes in the afternoon. The classes are free of charge and all learning materials are provided by the school. Under normal circumstances, most schools have their tuition classes held daily for about 2 hours. Some schools have it two hours from 1.30 until 3 or 3.45 pm while others have it for an hour from 1.30 until 2.30 pm every school day. Majority of the schools conduct the daily tuition sessions to upper primary classes (Primary 4, 5 and 6) and twice or thrice a week to lower primary classes (Primary 2 and 3). Primary 1 students are generally exempted from the after school tuition classes. Some schools opt to concentrate only on Primary 6 students in preparation for UPSR exam. However, since the starting of pandemic covid 19, most schools have cancelled their tuition classes.

Tuition classes are very important to ensure non-Chinese students acquire adequate help after school. As schools in Meradong district are located a bit further from town centers, it is difficult for parents to find private tuition classes or tuition centers. Those who are able to do so usually pay about RM30 to RM50 per month, depending on the subjects.

Teachers are very concern about the progress of non-Chinese students during this pandemic period as without tuition classes, it would limit their coping with school lessons and homework. Majority of non-Chinese students' family have no Chinese language background and they are not able to help with school work and revision. For the '2nd generation' non-Chinese students, they are of better hand as their mothers are capable to help with school work especially when tuition classes could not be conducted during the pandemic.

Mother's role is very crucial in ensuring students stay discipline in doing their homework such as practicing the correct strokes in Chinese characters. Many of the mothers in SJKC Kung Cheng, SJKC Kai Sing, SJKC Min Daik are school alumni. They have basic Chinese competency and is adept in helping their children in their studies. The schools also find that the '2<sup>nd</sup> generation' non-Chinese students are more discipline and competent in mastering Chinese language due to the frequent usage at home and mother's ability in assisting with school homework and revision.

### **Coping Strategies of Teachers**

The following section reveals the strategies employed by teachers in the eight SJKC schools. A total of 99 teachers were interviewed including eight principals from respective SJKC. 81 of the interviewed teachers are female teachers while 18 are male teachers. 97 of the teachers are Chinese while 2 are Malay teachers. The average years of service for the teachers in the teaching profession is 13 years and the longest service years is 28. All the teachers possessed teaching diploma or degree in education. The teachers obtained their teaching qualification from Institut Pendidikan Guru Batu Lintang, Institut Pendidikan Guru Rajang, Institut Pendidikan Guru Miri, Institut Pendidikan Guru Kampus Gaya, Institut Pendidikan Guru Sultan Abdul Halim, Institut Pendidikan Guru Perlis, Institut Perguruan Ilmu Khas IPIK , Open University Malaysia, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, University of Malaya, Universiti Utara Malaysia, Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman and Universiti Putra Malaysia,

### **Frequency of Chinese language usage**

The frequency of Chinese language usage is one of the major concerns of teachers, particularly for schools with more than 80% of non-Chinese students (SJKC Sematan, SJKC Tambirat and SJKC Kai Sing). In school and among peers, non-Chinese students in a school environment with majority non-Chinese students tend to use their mother tongue (Iban or Malay). Teachers have difficulty in making the students converse in Chinese language outside classes. Most of the time teachers have to translate more difficult terms or concept into Iban or Malay language. Majority of the teachers in Sarikei and Meradong SJKC are able to converse in Iban language. When conducting home visits or when meeting parents in school, most teachers would converse in Iban to the parents. For mothers who are alumni of SJKC there is no problem for conversation in Chinese language. The '2<sup>nd</sup> generation' non-Chinese students are also more exposed to Chinese language usage at home. Those with siblings studying or have studied in SJKC tend to speak more Chinese at home as well.

Teachers try their best to encourage non-Chinese students to speak and use Chinese as frequent as possible. Some of the teachers employ positive reinforcement tactics such as praising students who have demonstrated usage of Chinese language outside classes, or show good examples of Chinese essays, correct answers in Science questions, etc. Teachers are adamant that non-Chinese students can achieve good academic performance if they are motivated in the learning process. The challenges these students face are more than their Chinese classmates since they receive lesser help at home and the social environment, they are in do not render them more chances in using Chinese language. School is the only place they are exposed to Chinese language and most often the only place they practice the language. Teachers try to introduce as many interesting readings, stories or songs to them in various forms such as through videos, colourful printouts etc.

The availability of the two-years pre-school in SJKC has helped to ease the worries of most teachers, particularly those teaching Primary 1. These students who have been exposed to the school environment are able to understand basic Chinese language and many are able to use simple sentences such as greetings, seeking permission to toilet, etc. Pre-school helps in establishing earlier exposure to Chinese language which leads to better adaptation in the learning environment.

## **Employing the ‘Drill’ Teaching & Learning Method**

The drill method is among of the Teaching and Learning methods deemed successful to acquaint non-Chinese students with Chinese language. A new noun, adjective or verb is introduced and the particular word (noun or adjective or verb) repeated several times over the course of a few days. The word is either written on a small placard distributed to the students or pasted onto the noticeboard in class. Teachers go over the newly introduced word several times throughout the day, the following days and over the week. For example, the word ‘乾淨’ (gan jing) “clean’ is introduced during Chinese class on a Monday. In other classes on Monday, other teachers also get students to understand the meaning of the word and drill them to pronounce the word correctly. On the next day when another new word is introduced, the word ‘gan jing’ is also included in the drilling session. Throughout the five school days, students are exposed to five new words (noun, adjective or verb).

From the learners’ perspective, the students ‘register’ a new word, learn to pronounce the word by repetition and try to apply the learned word either in writing or through verbal conversation and in different context. This method is successful when all teachers work together in drilling the students over the course of a few days with the introduction of new words. One of the disadvantages of this method is students who are more competent in Chinese language might feel bored during the drilling session. It also takes up some of the teaching time of class session.

## **Coping with Pandemic Situation**

The cancellation of Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah (UPSR) due to the pandemic is making principals and teachers worry about the method of assessment for their students to proceed to secondary schools. For the case of SJKC in Meradong and Julau, the Chinese schools have come up with a standard examination for their Primary 6 to be held in November 2020. All the 14 SJKC in Meradong and SJKC Julau are involved in the formulation of the exam papers. Tasks are divided to each school in the contribution, formulation and checking of the exam questions.

During the movement control orders, classes were conducted either through online or teachers assign readings, homework via whatsapp or text messaging to parents. Teachers try their best to monitor students' homework daily. Photos of completed homework are requested by teachers. Parents and students are usually cooperative in sending the photos of homework. Teachers checked the homework and send the comments directly to the students or parents. Teachers explained that though they might risk not covering all the planned syllabus, they have to slow down in their teaching approach as there is lack of direct face-to-face teaching.

### **Successful examples of non-Chinese students**

Majority of teachers believe if parents give their full support in monitoring their children's homework, the children will be able to do well in school. Homework are given daily for almost all subjects to deepen students understanding in every new topics. It is not a understatement confirmed by teachers that SJKC tend to give a lot of homework. During tuition classes, teachers repeat the topics in order to consolidate students understanding. School work are checked and sometimes more exercises are given. If parents can further monitor and discipline their children in completing their daily homework, it would help in their children's learning process. Even though many non-Chinese parents are not equipped with Chinese language knowledge, non-Chinese parents can stress on the importance of completing school work given by teachers. Parents' cooperation is very important in ensuring schools' effort to improve non-Chinese students academic performance.

A few notable examples were given by teachers in SJKC Chung Hua Sematan and SJKC Kai Sing. Roland, a Primary 2 Iban student from SJKC Kai Sing has very supportive and enthusiastic parents. Roland's parents check on his homework daily and inquire with teachers through whatsapp when they stumble upon questions Roland could not do. The parents show very keen interest in helping Roland learn better in school. Both parents are not intelligible in Chinese language but they are very responsive and serious towards Roland's school performance. Another Iban student in SJKC Kai Sing, Eleaixea also has very encouraging parents. Although Eleaixea's parents are just farmers, they are strict with their daughter's study. They check on Eleaixea's school work everyday and do not allow Eleaixea to play or watch television until all her homework are completed. They

constantly lecture Eleaixea that without a good education, Eleaixea will not have good future. They also told their Primary 4 daughter that teachers are trying their best to teach and pass on their knowledge so that students can have good jobs when they grow up. Teachers are impressed with the parents' attitude in providing motivation and positive learning environment. Eleaixea is a top student in her year.

A Primary 3 student in SJKC Sematan, Fazri has a very positive attitude towards learning Chinese language. Both of his parents do not know Chinese language but that does not deter Fazri from trying to converse as much as possible in the language. Fazri speaks to his friends in Chinese and never fails to ask questions in class. Sometimes he corrects his friends when they do not use the correct terms or when their pronunciations are incorrect. As Fazri shows great interest in his study, his parents send him to private tuition classes in Lundu during weekends. Another Malay student, Naidah also portray the same positive learning attitude. Naidah is in Primary 2 and she has no Chinese language background when she started school. She is very active in class and always ask questions. She is hardworking and inquisitive in learning. Her school work are always neatly completed and if she made mistakes, she will ask teachers about the corrections. From the successful examples shown above, parents and students attitude toward learning play a significant role in the ability for non-Chinese students to cope and excel in school.

## **Coping Strategies of Parents<sup>15</sup>**

A total of 164 parents or guardians of non-Chinese students were interviewed directly either in the schools or in their homes. Grandparents and relatives are also interviewed as they are the main guardians of the non-Chinese students while their parents are working and living apart from them in urban towns. In this study, the word 'parents' encompassed guardians. The interview session was held on a one-to-one basis between the interviewer and the parent in schools or at homes. The ethnicity of the parents consists of 116 Iban, 34 Malay, 5 Chinese<sup>16</sup>, 2 Bidayuh, 2 Melanau, 1 Orang Ulu, 1 Kadazan, 1 Thai and 1 Filipino. The median age of the parents is 41 with the youngest age of 25 and oldest age of 71. Majority of parents interviewed are female (111 or 68%) and from this number, 68 of the female parents are housewives. The number of parents working as agriculturalists or farmers and fishermen is 54 (33%). The number of parents working in the government sector is 24 (15%) and in private sector is 18 (11%).

On the reason why parents send their children to SJKC despite the language barrier, most parents (129 or 79%) are hopeful that by acquiring Chinese language competency their children will have better job prospects.

The remaining reasons are:

- Teachers in SJKC are very strict and their children will be better disciplined. Parents believe if their children are better discipline from young in their school work, school performance, they will not have much disciplinary problems when they go to secondary schools.
- Parents are convinced that if their children are exposed to Chinese culture which places a lot of emphasis on diligence and hard work, their children will be become good adults in future.
- Parents are impressed with the beautiful SJKC school landscape, which is well maintained and always clean. Covered multi purpose hall, basketball courts, airconditioned classrooms are among the attractions for parents to send their children to study in SJKC.

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<sup>15</sup> Include guardians (grandparents, relatives).

<sup>16</sup> The spouses are non-Chinese, their children's ethnicity is not Chinese.

Ten parents are knowledgeable in Chinese language because they studied in SJKC before and 20 parents are able to converse in Chinese language due to the exposure of interacting with Chinese peers in school and from workplace. Majority of parents (113 or 69%) are of the opinion that their children are facing difficulty coping with school work. Almost the same percentage (67%) or number of parents (110) also perceived SJKC have more assessments than national schools. However, non of the interviewed parents regretted sending their children to SJKC despite the heavy school workload and the regular examinations.

Majority of the parents try their very best to assist their children in their homework. Only 27 parents mentioned they are incapable in helping their children at all because of language problems. A few grandparents said they would like to help their grandchildren but they couldn't due to poor eye sights and bad memory. Majority of parents/guardians (73%) are interested to attend Chinese language classes for adults in order to help their children better and also as a life long learning skill that would be useful in their daily lives and at work place.

Majority of parents are not considering in sending their children to Chinese secondary schools though they appreciate the moral values, language competency their children acquired through Chinese education. The reasons being:

- i) Parents foresee the learning difficulties their children will face in secondary level Chinese education
- ii) Chinese secondary schools are costly because of incurrences of monthly school fees
- iii) Unavailability of Chinese secondary schools nearby their homes
- iv) Lack of information if certain Chinese secondary schools provide boarding, scholarships for non-Chinese etc.

The following section are the coping mechanism employed by parents to assist their children's learning process

### **Emphasizing Attendance in Tuition Classes**

Parents show very positive response in having their children attending school tuition classes. In most of the schools visited, tuition classes are held every weekday for 1 ½ to

2 hours. Parents send lunch to their children right after official school session has ended. They come again to fetch the children after the tuition classes have ended. Several trips to and from the school are required daily for parents. As most families are living with extended family members such as grandparents, aunts, cousins, the availability of extra help ease the burden of parents. Sometimes a neighbour who lives in the same village or longhouse will help to send lunch as he/she is also sending lunch to his/her child attending the same school. The family and communal support helps to ease the burden off parents.

Most of the non-Chinese parents are not competent in Chinese language and they realized the importance of tuition classes organized by the school. The classes are conducted free of charge and teachers are very serious in the attendance. Teachers will usually inquire directly with parents if they see parents coming to fetch the children home after school instead of staying on for tuition classes. Parents also realized if their children are not attending tuition classes in school, they might end up playing or not doing anything at home. Parents also realized the more time the children are in school, the more they pick up Chinese language.

Private tuition classes<sup>17</sup> are very limited in semi rural areas and if available, the monthly tuition fees can be a burden since most parents are self employed (farmers, fishermen). Most mothers are housewives without any source of income. Some of the mothers weave handicrafts, do sewing, cooking and baking as side income but it is not a stable source of financial support. The availability of free tuition classes conducted by the schools help to ease their financial situation. It also helps the mothers to have more time to do sewing, weaving of handicrafts, cooking or baking when their children are attending tuition classes.

Parents are also very grateful and touch that teachers are very committed to their children's study. Teachers will immediately ask about students' condition if they are not in school. If their children do not attend school for a few days, the principal or class teacher will call the parents or visit the family directly. Some parents commented that

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<sup>17</sup> Only 15 out of the 170 interviewed parents send their children to private tuition classes. The tuition fees range from RM30 to RM50 per month. The private tuition classes are held usually at night from 7 until 9 pm.

### **Cooperative with Teachers**

Parents are adamant that teachers are doing their very best to help their children. They see the commitment of teachers and try to cooperate as much as possible. Although they use the 'Kami nak nemu' phrase a lot when it comes to their children's study, they are very forward looking with their children's future. Being equipped with Chinese language competency and Chinese moral values of diligence, obedience, respectful, parents think their children will have a better job prospect in future. The school and teachers are given total authority to discipline their children. Some parents said they always ask the teachers to cane their children if they are being mischievous or lazy in school. They believe under the strong emphasis of discipline by teachers, their children will turn out to be better adults.

### **Cooperative with School**

Parents are very supportive in activities organized by the school. Whenever there is an activity that involves parents' participation, they will attend. Parents' cooperation is attested by teachers and principals. All eight SJKC principals and teachers mentioned parents despite not being literate in Chinese language, never fail to support in the activities organized. For example, in *gotong royong* or *keceriaan* activities held during weekend, almost all parents participate in the activities. They also bring along items such as brooms, pails, paint brush, etc even without being asked to. In SJKC Chung Hien, parents and school work together in a "Kebun Nanas Sekolah" project. Parents contribute stalks of pineapples and planted them in the allocated plot of land. Parents come by frequently to weed, put fertilizer etc even without requested by the school. The project is initiated by Parents and Teachers Association, and the profit of the pineapple sale will go directly to the school.

All the SJKC schools organize activities related to cultural celebrations during festivity time such as Chinese New Year, Gawai, Hari Raya, and also tradition related activities such as dumpling making, ketupat making, lemang making, lantern making, etc. Parents are always responsive to these activities and participate actively.

Many parents mentioned teachers and schools go the extra mile to organize these

activities, on top of their heavy teaching workload. They also mentioned through such activities they are able to know the teachers and parents better. They get to do something useful with their children over the weekend. They also get the chance to acquire new knowledge and learn to appreciate the diversity of cultural practices of different ethnic groups. They said these events are always enjoyable and fun, therefore they always look forward to school activities.

### **Coping Strategies of Students**

A total of 267<sup>18</sup> students comprising 123 girl and 144 boy students were interviewed. From this number, 81 are Malay students, 169 Iban students, 7 Bidayuh students, 2 Melanau and 8 from other ethnicity or nationalities. Among these students, 100 of them have at least one sibling studying in the same school while 23 have two siblings studying in the same school. The school with the most siblings studying together is SJKC Chung Hua Sematan (22 students).

The favourite subject of students is Bahasa Melayu (210 or 79%), while the most difficult subject is English (227 or 85%). Only 85 students (32%) mentioned they speak Chinese at home and mostly to their siblings. When asked if they speak Chinese to their friends in school, 184 students (69%) said yes.

### **Try to finish daily school work**

Most students are worried they will be reprimanded if they do not complete their daily school work. Parents will ask if they have finished their homework before they can play outside, use the handphone or watch television. Teachers consistently check on their school work and will give punishment if work are not completed. Teachers will also inform parents on the progress of the students consistently. Therefore to avoid positive punishment from parents and teachers such as being singled out in class or being scolded, or negative punishment such not allowed to use handphone or watch television, students try their best in completing their daily school work.

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<sup>18</sup> Primary 1 (54 students), Primary 2 (54 students), Primary 3 (42 students), Primary 4 (47 students), Primary 5 (35 students), Primary 6 (35 students).

### **Usage of Media helps in study**

Students expressed their likings when teachers use various methods in teaching. They like to watch and listen to stories shown on videos. Some of the video links are shared to their parents and they have access in watching the videos again at leisure. They said this helps in their understanding of the topic and especially in new Chinese words or phrases. The sound from the video enable them to mimic the pronunciations better. They said sometimes the whole family watch the video together and everyone try to learn together. Even the grandparents will try to pronounce the Chinese words. They said it is sometimes hilarious and fun, but it helps in their understanding.

### **Interruptions to project progress**

In March 2020, plans were made for the team together with field assistants to conduct fieldwork in several urban schools (SJKC no. 1 and SJKC no. 4) and rural schools (SJKC Tambirat, SJKC Simunjan, SJKC Sebuyau). Data collection should be completed by April 2020 for the five mentioned schools. However, due to the sudden Movement Control Order and closure of schools, all plans were halt. Fieldwork plan was rearranged and schools visited included those in Sarikei and Meradong districts.

### **Upcoming Fieldwork in 2021**

Data collection will resume in February 2021 after the new school year starts in late January 2021. The team will try to cover 6 schools listed below with the expected date of fieldwork accomplishment by end of July 2021. The schools are chosen based on its location (urban/rural) and the high percentage of non-Chinese students.

1. SJK Chung Hua No.1 古晋中华小学第一校
2. SJK Chung Hua No.4 古晋中华小学第四校
3. SJK Chung Hua Batu 15 鵬裡遜十五哩中華公學
4. SJK Chung Hua Batu 11 Matang 馬當十一哩中華公學
5. SJK Chung Hua Sungai Buda 水塘路中華公學
6. SJK Chung Hua Buntal 文丹中華公學