

ATTITUDES TOWARDS BIDAYUH AS A MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION FOR KINDERGARTENS IN SARAWAK, MALAYSIA

Florence G. Kayad^{1*} and Su-Hie Ting²

^{1,2} Faculty of Language and Communication, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, Sarawak, Malaysia

*Corresponding author: shting@unimas.my

Abstract: *Currently the indigenous languages used as the medium of instruction in public schools in Malaysia are Iban in Sarawak, KadazanDusun in Sabah, and Semai in West Malaysia. While the medium of instruction in kindergartens is not as strictly regulated as the medium of instruction in public schools, the demand for kindergartens using indigenous languages need to be high enough for the programme to be sustainable. There are presently some Bidayuh playschools and preschools established by the Dayak Bidayuh National Association in Sarawak. The study examined attitudes towards Bidayuh as a medium of instruction for kindergartens among the Bidayuh community in Sarawak, Malaysia. Questionnaire data were obtained from 61 Bidayuh who originated from the Kuching and Kota Samarahan districts. Results showed mixed responses to the prospect of setting up kindergartens using Bidayuh as the medium of instruction but a majority were in support. The participants believed that Bidayuh language kindergartens would provide opportunities for children to learn Bidayuh language and culture, and good moral values. However, 41% of the participants disagreed that it should be for the purpose of providing higher quality education. There were some concerns on the selection of the Bidayuh variety to use as the medium of instruction, curriculum and logistics which indicate the tremendous challenges faced by mother tongue-based kindergartens.*

Keywords: *Bidayuh, kindergarten, mother tongue-based education, indigenous language, culture*

1. Introduction

Malaysia, a Southeast Asian country with 32.73 million population (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2021) has a multilingual population. It is estimated that there are 134 established languages in Malaysia, of which 112 are indigenous languages (Eberhard, Simons, & Fennig, 2020). Omar (2014) estimated that 80 indigenous languages from the Austronesian language family are found in Sabah and Sarawak, the two Malaysian states situated on the island of Borneo. Sarawak, with at least 25 different ethnic groups (Kheung & Aduce, 2018) has more than 51 indigenous languages based on lexico-statistic studies (Norahim, forthcoming). The Bidayuh language is the fourth largest indigenous language group in Sarawak with 217,800 speakers (Sarawak Government Portal, 2017), after the Iban, Malay, and Chinese. Yet, recent studies on the usage and vitality of the Bidayuh language have found that the language is showing signs of gradual shift or decline due to various factors including urban migration, education and mixed marriage whereby the younger generation use dominant languages such as English and Malay for communication and education and many parents are not