

The Role of Indigenous Song Employed by The Preschool Teacher to Help Children Develop Reading Skills

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Abstract:

This study explores the role of Indigenous songs in enhancing reading skills among preschool children in the Orang Asli community. Using a descriptive methodology, data was collected through focus group interviews and questionnaires from preschool teachers. The findings indicate that educators use Indigenous songs as a strategic tool to introduce children to reading skills in Malay, while also fostering an early interest in reading. Indigenous songs facilitate language acquisition but also promote cultural identity and engagement in learning. The study emphasizes the importance of age-appropriate and culturally relevant Indigenous songs, which provide positive feedback during reading activities to boost children's confidence and motivation. Overall, the results highlight the significant impact of Orang Asli preschool teachers in leveraging Indigenous songs for literacy development, as well as urging the continued use of these songs in educational settings to enrich young students' experiences and strengthen their connection to cultural heritage.

Keywords: *Indigenous Song, Masyarakat Orang Asli, Preschool teachers', Reading skills, children*

1. Introduction

The Malaysian Education Development Plan 2013-2025, under Initiative #57: Transformation of Indigenous and Indigenous Education (Pusat Pembangunan Kurikulum Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia., 2012), has been implemented to ensure equity by providing equal access to education for Indigenous students alongside mainstream education. This goal can be achieved through the determination and involvement of all parties. Malay language has been elevated as the official and national language.

According to (Nor Azwahanum Nor Shaid, Shahidi A. Hamid, 2022) Malay language served as the sole language of instruction in schools and universities. The situation is different for minority communities, particularly non-native speakers who view Malay as their second language. Orang Asli community, struggle to master the language because they need to learn it formally in schools. As a result, their educational achievements are lacking, with Orang Asli children trailing behind others and experiencing high dropout rates. In Malaysia, indigenous groups may drop out of school because they face challenges like poverty and bad infrastructure. (Wan Ya Shin & Russalina, 2021) The lack of proficiency in the Malay language is seen as one of the main reasons causing difficulty in understanding the language used (Nor Azwahanum Nor Shaid, Shahidi A. Hamid, 2022). This issue will develop into concerns about Malay language proficiency, which serves as the medium of instruction in public schools in Malaysia, including at the preschool level. Indigenous children who do not continue their education often engage in activities that generate family income by collecting forest products.

Previous studies are limited and focused more on Orang Asli students at the primary and secondary school levels. However, there is a need to conduct research at the preschool level to improve basic reading skills. Based on the Kurikulum Standard Prasekolah Kebangsaan (Bahagian Pembangunan Kurikulum, 2017) has been established by the Ministry, which includes six primary components: Language and Communication, Cognitive Development, Spiritual and Moral, Socio-Emotional Development, Physical Development, and Creativity and Aesthetics. For them, mastery of the 3Rs—reading, writing, and arithmetic—is considered sufficient for sustaining life in the forest. (M. F. Abdullah, 2019). This study is important to ensure that children successfully complete their preschool education as preparation before entering Year 1 in primary school. Research gaps indicate that the indigenous community urgently needs guidance and motivation to address their children's education dropout issues (Sajat et al., 2023). Additionally, exploring their mastery of the Malay language and learning experiences can enhance their second language skills and learning abilities. Therefore, their experiences in acquiring and learning the Malay language will be described through the exploration of Indigenous songs from the indigenous culture through this qualitative lens.

Literature Review

There is substantial evidence that indigenous children face serious challenges in schooling, in general, and in literacy development, specifically. Thus, it is essential to design early literacy programmes that engage indigenous children and produce positive outcomes. Literacy is crucial for every child including indigenous, previous researchers have made strong arguments evidence on how Indigenous song can help in developing literacy skills.

Challenges Teaching Orang Asli Children

Shuhidan et al., 2024 (Shuhidan et al., 2024) in article focuses on the dropout prevention strategies implemented by the Malaysian government to address educational disparities faced by Orang Asli children. Findings indicate that successful interventions must consider these factors to enhance literacy outcomes effectively. The authors conclude that ongoing support and policy adjustments are necessary to ensure that educational programs are responsive to the needs of indigenous communities, ultimately aiming for greater equity in education.

Similarly, Sawalludin et al., 2020, highlights significant challenges in the education of the Orang Asli in Malaysia. Major challenges include low awareness of education's importance within the community and limited accessibility to educational institutions due to geographic isolation. Parents' lack of formal education also negatively affects their children's academic motivation, include inadequate infrastructure such as poor roads and lack of proper transportation, making school attendance difficult. The study concludes that addressing these barriers, particularly by improving access and increasing community awareness of education, is vital for improving literacy and education quality among Orang Asli children.

Explores various outreach programs designed to enhance literacy skills among Orang Asli children while simultaneously developing teachers' competencies in culturally appropriate pedagogies. The authors emphasize that (Wahab & Mustapha, 2015) (A. H. Abdullah, 2022) discovered that Orang Asli students struggled to comprehend because some had not yet become proficient in the Malay language and uses their tribal language. It is also difficult for teachers to explain concepts to Orang Asli students in a way that they can understand.

It is difficult to teach Malay language communication to Orang Asli children. According to (Awang et al., 2022), this issue arises because Orang Asli youngsters are influenced by their mother tongue. Due to the disparities between their native tongue and the Malay language, youngsters struggle when teachers teach them the language but they do not practise it at home or with friends. In addition to linguistic challenges, there are limitations with regard to resources for instruction and learning. Since the majority of Orang Asli schools are situated in isolated locations, it is challenging to obtain instructional materials, which necessitates travel time and distance. The (KSPK, 2017) (Bahagian Pembangunan Kurikulum, 2017) are incompatible with the Orang Asli's deeply nature-based culture and customs.

Additionally, Orang Asli parents and kids believe that communicating in Malay is irrelevant to their jungle life. This misconception subtly conveys the idea that knowledge of the Malay language is unnecessary and that Orang Asli lack the motivation to acquire it. It was shown that Orang Asli's low self-esteem, shyness, and quiet with other kids and also contribute to their limited exposure to Malaysian language and culture throughout their preschool education (Wook et al., 2022). Children who are Orang Asli need a teaching strategy that is in line with their cultural background and traditions in order to spark their interest in learning Malay.

Music and Children to Develop Reading Skills

Music and children are inseparable in daily life, such as through music in the family, its use in childcare, and the development of reading and musical skills. Research explores different cultural contexts and reflects trends and projects in early childhood music education. These findings combine historical perspectives on various topics and approaches. (Warren Brodsky, 2021)

Lev Vygotsky's theories emphasize the importance of the social and cultural environment in education. His concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is one of the most recognized parts of his theory. In the ZPD, a learner moves along a learning continuum toward mastering a new skill, often with guidance or external support (Vygotsky, 1978). According to Piaget, children learn best when adults encourage them to explore, experiment, and ask questions about their environment. He believed that preschool teachers should focus on supporting children's growth by providing opportunities for discovery. Understanding the preoperational stage, where children express ideas

from their own experiences, is essential for effective preschool teaching (Jones, 2019). In the context of this study, both theories help clarify and guide teaching and learning activities in reading for the development of Indigenous preschool children.

Interestingly, previous study at Britian by (Obeng, 2022) state that Children are inherently musical, and early exposure to music facilitates learning by fostering language growth, creativity, coordination, and social skills. It is important to design early childhood music programs that incorporate self-directed activities, opportunities for individual and small group interactions, as well as musical experiences that are appropriate and effective for development in early education.

Previous research from (Herrera et al., 2015) has shown that music instruction plays a crucial role in improving reading and language skills. It aids in sound processing for both music and language, boosts language development in children, enhances phonological and short-term memory, and supports better learning of a second language. Music has been found to improve academic performance in both language and math. Several leading scholars have shown interest in studying the effects of music on children's development. Early research focused on how toddlers learn from listening to music. (Obeng, 2022) In this study are exploring how teacher of Indigenous children can exposure to indigenous musical genres impacts reading development outside of the classroom context.

Music can turn classrooms into supportive places where children excel academically, socially, and emotionally. By offering both structured and open-ended musical activities, fostering trust and respect, and encouraging creativity among peers, we can create a strong foundation for young learners' growth and development.(Paquette & Rieg, 2008) Music can be seamlessly incorporated into various subjects to help improve vocabulary and language understanding. It aids in the development of listening and speaking skills, enhances focus and memory, and promotes abstract thinking. Furthermore, music fosters creativity and cultural understanding in Indigenous children.

Developing reading skills among Orang Asli children can be achieved through enrichment learning, which enhances language skills and helps them become good language users through engaging and stimulating exercises, ensuring that the Malay language is used in the correct context in social and cultural environment in education through the exploration of Indigenous songs.(Nor Azwahanum Nor Shaid, Shahidi A. Hamid, 2022)

Study Rationale and Aims

This study was developed to explore the role of Indigenous songs in several related aspects, such as the role and importance of these traditional songs and their effects on the reading development of preschool children. The study also examines the extent to which Indigenous preschool teachers use traditional Indigenous songs in their teaching and learning within the classroom.

This study aligns with the Malaysian Education Development Plan 2013-2025, under Initiative #57: Transformation of Indigenous and Indigenous Education. This includes ensuring equity by providing equal access to education for Indigenous students alongside mainstream education. This goal can be achieved through the determination and involvement of all parties. The Malay language has been elevated as the official and national language. This initiative also aligns with the (KSPM, 2017), which has been established by the Ministry and includes six primary components: Language and Communication, Cognitive Development, Spiritual and Moral Development, Socio-Emotional Development, Physical Development, and Creativity and Aesthetics. Ultimately, this study aims to enhance the mastery of Malay reading skills among Indigenous children through the role of traditional Indigenous songs employed by preschool teachers.

According to the (Catherine Cynthia Felix, 2021), the traditional songs of a community have the potential to serve as a tool in helping to improve children's learning abilities and academic achievement. As there are many advantages to using Indigenous songs that align with the culture and background of the Indigenous community itself. Although there are various issues and challenges in educating these Indigenous preschool children (Nor Azwahanum Nor Shaid, Shahidi A. Hamid, 2022), so preschool teachers should be more creative in utilizing traditional resources from the Indigenous community, using Indigenous songs in classroom. Preschool teachers must also be more understanding, patient, and practical in creating a positive learning environment in line with the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) to achieve meaningful teaching and learning objectives among Indigenous children.

2. Methode

Study Design

This qualitative study determined the answer to the following research question : What role do indigenous songs play in support the development of reading skills among Children?

Settings

Study participants were selected from a group of preschool teacher from Kuala Lipis district. They were interviewed at the Orang Asli Preschool in Kuala Lipis Pahang.

Data Collection

The qualitative data collection process examines the respondents' perceptions regarding the role of Indigenous songs by preschool teachers to help their children progress in reading skills. During the interviews, participants shared their experiences teaching children as well as some challenges they faced due to differences in customs and language gaps. In addition, we also explored issues in various aspects occurring within the Orang Asli preschool community and provided some opinions on how to improve reading skills among children by utilizing their cultural background, specifically Indigenous songs. To ensure the reliability and validity of the data collection, we appointed note-takers to record all information gathered from the conversations.

Data Analysis

Transcriptions were reviewed to check for accuracy before further content analysis was conducted. After that, clear pattern and consensus was reached among the study team and it was analysed using Nvivo software.

3. Result

A total of 5 respondents were interviewed in this study. Five preschool teachers who teach Indigenous preschool children in Malay Language Communication were involved. Among them were preschool teachers who have served for more than 10 years in the related field. The findings from this semi-structured interview revealed the following themes in the current study: (a) The role of sewang songs in children's reading development, (b) The impact of using sewang songs on children's reading development, and (c) The teaching approaches and methods of preschool teachers. The primary themes, subthemes, and illustrative quotes from the qualitative data are summarized in Table 1.

List of themes, sub-themes and representative quotes from qualitative study

Table 1

Themes	Subthemes	Representative quotes
Use of Indigenous Songs	What role do indigenous songs play in your classroom?	“Indigenous song can help language acquisition and cultural identity. My children can remember the alphabet and engage with the reading development. I can help my children to improve reading skills while allowing them to express their creativity with fun learning environment.”
	select which songs to use, and how do the children respond to them?	“I choose songs that are commonly sung by children and reflect their culture, such as "Babola Baboo." These songs are very familiar to them, making it easier for them to connect with the learning materials. The children become excited and actively participate in singing and dancing.”
	songs help the children engage better with reading activities? How?	“Indigenous songs can help Orang Asli preschool children become more interested in reading activities. When we use songs that they are familiar with at home, they become more excited and enjoy learning. They naturally learn new words while singing, making it easier for them to remember.”

Impact on Reading Skills	any specific ways in which these songs support the development of reading skills, such as phonemic awareness or vocabulary?	“I find that using Indigenous songs really supports their reading development. The rhythm and repetition in the songs help them identify sounds, which improves their phonemic awareness. They also pick up new words from the lyrics, and because the songs are familiar, it makes learning vocabulary easier for them.”
	using indigenous songs has helped children make progress in their reading skills?	“Yes, in my opinion, using Indigenous songs really helps preschool children progress in their reading skills. The songs they are familiar with make it easier for them to associate with words, and they start recognizing letters and sounds through repetition in the songs. I've noticed that they become more interested in learning to read and can remember the letters and syllables taught by the teacher better.”
	using indigenous can engage children's interest in learning to read and foster positive emotions for coming to school?	“The use of Indigenous songs truly engages children's interest and makes them excited to learn. When they sing songs that reflect their culture, it creates a joyful atmosphere in the classroom. This connection helps them feel happy about coming to school and participating in reading activities.”

Teaching Approaches	teaching approach when working with Orang Asli children?	“My teaching approach emphasizes the importance of cultural relevance. I use Indigenous songs to connect with their background, making learning more meaningful and enjoyable. I also employ a play-based learning approach with singing and movement techniques in classroom.”
	incorporate cultural elements, such as indigenous songs, into your lessons?	“I integrate Indigenous songs into my teaching to connect with the children's cultural backgrounds. These songs help them feel more comfortable and engaged during learning. By using melodies they are familiar with, I make reading activities more enjoyable and meaningful for them.”

Although we get the positive findings from the teachers who employed the children develop reading skills, but there are issu and challenges that they go through along the way in teaching process among the Indigenous children.

Theme 1 : Role of Indigenous Song

Most of the teacher according to the qualitative study and the information gathered from the participants. In the context of teaching Indigenous students, Indigenous songs are a fundamental part of my classroom strategy(Peter Obeng et al., 2022). I carefully select songs that the children are familiar with, such as traditional songs they often hear at home. This familiarity helps create a comfortable and relevant learning environment, allowing students to connect more deeply with the material we are exploring.

Other than that, when teachers incorporate these songs into our lessons, I notice a significant positive reaction from the children. They become more engaged and excited during our music sessions, actively participating in singing and dancing. This level of engagement is essential, as it builds a sense of community and belonging among the students, making them feel more connected to their learning experiences(Aziz & Masnan, 2022).

From the discussion, Indigenous songs also play a important role in enhancing children's engagement in reading activities. By using songs that reflect their cultural background, I help them

associate words and sounds with their everyday experiences. This connection makes learning to read more enjoyable and meaningful for the children, encouraging them to participate more actively in reading exercises .

Furthermore, integrating these songs supports the development of essential reading skills, such as phonemic awareness and vocabulary acquisition. The repetitive nature of music reinforces language patterns, making it easier for children to recognize letters and syllables. This approach not only makes reading less intimidating but also transforms it into a fun and interactive process.

From the result, incorporating Indigenous songs into my teaching approach is a powerful method for enhancing the literacy skills of Indigenous preschool children. By selecting culturally relevant songs and creating an engaging classroom environment, I can significantly improve their reading skills while fostering a love for learning rooted in their cultural heritage. This strategy benefits their academic progress and strengthens their identity and connection to the community.

Theme 2 : Impact on Reading Skills

The findings reveal some impact of Indigenous songs plays a important role in fostering reading skills. Teachers report that these songs effectively support various aspects of reading development, such as phonemic awareness and vocabulary acquisition. By incorporating familiar melodies and culturally relevant lyrics into lessons, teachers create a bridge between children's linguistic experiences and the reading materials they encounter in the classroom. This connection enhances children's engagement with the language, making reading activities more accessible and enjoyable.

The rhythmic and repetitive nature of Indigenous songs helps develop phonemic awareness among preschool children. Teachers note that these songs often contain simple, repetitive phrases that allow children to practice and identify sounds and syllables. This teaching approach using songs and music enables students to build a foundational understanding of how words are formed, which is crucial for early reading skills. By hearing these sounds in a musical context, children are more prepared to recognize letter sounds and subsequently identify syllables.

Recognise alphabet and sound out the words in reading development is where Indigenous songs make a significant contribution. Teachers emphasize that these songs introduce children to

new words in a contextual and engaging manner. As children sing, they learn the meanings of words through the repetition of song lyrics. This playful learning approach not only enriches their vocabulary but also enhances their comprehension skills, making it easier for them to understand concepts presented in their reading material (Peter Obeng et al., 2022).

In addition to promoting literacy skills, Indigenous songs help foster positive emotional connections to learning. Teachers observe that integrating music into the curriculum generates excitement and enthusiasm among children. When students engage in singing and dancing, their enjoyment of the learning process increases, reinforcing a more positive attitude toward attending school. This emotional engagement is critical for early learners, as it encourages them to actively participate in reading activities without fear of failure.

Furthermore, the use of Indigenous songs strengthens children's cultural identity, providing them with a sense of belonging. Teachers note that when children hear songs that reflect their heritage, they feel more connected to their cultural roots and are more comfortable expressing themselves in the classroom. This cultural affirmation can significantly impact their willingness to learn and engage with the content, including reading activities, as they see the relevance of their cultural identity in the educational process.

In conclusion, Indigenous songs serve as an effective tool for enhancing reading skills among preschool children in Indigenous communities. By supporting phonemic awareness, vocabulary development, and fostering positive emotional connections to learning, these songs significantly contribute to children's progress in literacy. The integration of cultural elements into teaching practices not only makes learning more enjoyable but also helps reinforce children's cultural identity, ultimately creating a more holistic and meaningful educational experience.

Theme 3 : Teaching Approaches

In teaching Orang Asli children, a culturally responsive teaching approach is essential for creating an effective learning environment. Teachers emphasize the importance of incorporating cultural elements, particularly Indigenous songs, into lessons. This culturally responsive strategy helps establish meaningful connections between the curriculum and the students' cultural heritage,

making learning more relevant and enjoyable. By integrating these songs, educators can engage students on a personal level, enhancing their appreciation of their cultural identity.

Indigenous songs serve as a tools for bridging cultural gaps in the classroom. Teachers select songs that reflect the students' backgrounds and experiences, allowing them to relate to the material more easily. This connection fosters a sense of belonging and security in the classroom. When students feel recognized and valued through their cultural expressions, their motivation to participate in learning activities increases significantly, leading to better educational outcomes.

Incorporating Indigenous songs into lessons also facilitates a multisensory learning experience. Teachers use singing and music techniques to engage different learning styles, making lessons dynamic and interactive. Through singing, dancing, and movement, students can actively participate in their learning process, which is crucial for preschool children who often learn best through hands-on experiences. This approach captures their interest while reinforcing learning objectives, making concepts more memorable and easier to understand.

Furthermore, using Indigenous songs encourages collaborative learning among students. As they engage in group singing and activities, children develop essential social skills such as teamwork, communication, and empathy. This cooperative learning environment promotes positive relationships among peers, which is vital for fostering a supportive classroom community (Peter Obeng et al., 2022). Teachers observe that students who feel connected to their classmates are more likely to participate in discussions and share ideas, enhancing their overall learning experience.

As a result, teaching approach when working with Orang Asli children involves integrating cultural elements like Indigenous songs into lessons. This culturally responsive strategy enhances engagement, promotes social interaction, and fosters a sense of belonging among students. By creating a dynamic and inclusive learning environment, educators can support the holistic development of Orang Asli children while honoring their cultural heritage and helping them achieve their educational goals.

4. Discussion

Previous studies have shown that indigenous songs play an important role in encouraging active participation among children in the classroom. This study found that children are more confident in

expressing their emotions while singing, and indigenous preschoolers need continuous opportunities to develop reading skills through singing activities. Singing has proven to be both enjoyable and stimulating for preschoolers, aligning with the findings of (Aziz & Masnan, 2022), which showed that children's engagement in class becomes increasingly active through singing.

Secondly, the use of indigenous songs in the classroom can enhance the reading skills of indigenous children. Integrating these songs into lessons not only supports literacy development but also fosters student engagement and interest in learning. A study by (Politimou et al., 2019) highlighted the connection between music and language skills in early childhood, with positive effects on phonemic awareness and vocabulary acquisition. Singing indigenous songs is both enjoyable and effective, consistent with the findings of (Amalia & Hasana, 2019) on the importance of nurturing language skills through singing from an early age.

Additionally, culturally responsive teaching approaches used by preschool teachers increase students' love for learning and motivation to engage in educational activities. This study found that effective teachers consistently stimulate and motivate children through the activity of singing indigenous songs, encouraging them to speak, voice their opinions, and actively participate in class. (Zainiah Mohamed Isa et al., 2021) also suggested that teachers can relate learning issues to children's existing experiences. Teachers should provide opportunities for indigenous children to interact and speak, fostering their language, communication, and literacy development in preparation for Year 1.

On the other hand, preschool teachers need to be more creative and adaptable to the challenges they face in educating indigenous children, adopting a more inclusive approach that acknowledges the students' cultural backgrounds. This is a crucial step toward achieving better educational outcomes for indigenous children. Therefore, the role of indigenous songs, when integrated into well-facilitated teaching and learning processes (PdPc), can have a significant impact on supporting the overall development of reading skills among preschool children.

5. Summary

According to the present research, there are several use of indigenous songs in teaching is effective in improving the reading skills of indigenous children, based on qualitative interview

findings. The integration of cultural elements into learning also significantly enhances students' literacy. Therefore, it is crucial to tailor teaching strategies to the needs and cultural backgrounds of students to prevent reading development issues. Adequate planning of educational infrastructure is also necessary to ensure indigenous children have access to quality, competitive education.

In conclusion, indigenous songs serve as an effective tool and medium for supporting the development of reading skills in indigenous children. Through singing activities, they learn language skills, new vocabulary, memorization of lyrics, and engage in creative movements with their peers. Therefore, preschool teachers must remain attentive and continually seek to expand their knowledge. This study aims to improve indigenous children's reading skills and contribute to the enhancement of the national education system, preparing well-rounded individuals who are ready to face future global challenges.

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