

Examining Language Development and Revitalisation Initiatives: The Case of the Bidayuh Language in Sarawak

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Abstract

This article examines development and revitalisation initiatives for the Bidayuh language, spoken in Sarawak, East Malaysia. Bidayuh has six main variants which are not mutually intelligible. In addition, it is mainly used in rural settings and is not the main language of choice in mixed marriages. Moreover, Bidayuh did not have a standardised orthography until 2003. These factors have affected the development of the language, which is to be contrasted with the Iban language, spoken by the main ethnic group in Sarawak, which is currently offered in primary schools as Pupil's Own Language (POL) and as an elective subject in the secondary school *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (SPM) examination. The focus of this article is the language development and revitalization initiatives undertaken by various stakeholders between 1963 (the year of the formation of the Federation of Malaysia) and today. Special attention will be paid to the outcome of the Multilingual Education (MLE) project, which is an extension of the Bidayuh Language Development Project (BLDP) initiated by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in Asia, and undertaken by the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) and the Dayak Bidayuh National Association (DBNA). Interviews with representatives of the

community were conducted to discover their perceptions towards these initiatives, and to identify factors that might contribute to their success and/or failure. The article ends with some suggestions about how to improve the success of language revitalisation initiatives for Bidayuh.

Keywords: Indigenous language, revitalization initiatives, Bidayuh language, Sarawak, Iban

1. Introduction

Eberhard, Simons, and Fennig (2019) list 134 living languages in Malaysia, of which 95 are considered to be threatened, while 15 are dying (Simon & Fennig, 2018), a rather gloomy picture of language endangerment across the country. Furthermore, many of the languages listed as threatened are indigenous languages¹ spoken in the states of Sarawak and Sabah, on the island of Borneo. Multilingualism is the norm in Sarawak, with communication among the heterogeneous groups primarily through the medium of Sarawak Malay (Smith & Smith, 2017). In general, being bilingual in one's mother tongue and Sarawak Malay does not necessarily imply eventual language shift, however the Bidayuh community is one that is experiencing an ongoing language shift (Coluzzi, Riget, & Wang, 2013; Norazuna, 2017). For instance, some Bidayuh children, particularly in the urban areas, are no longer using or acquiring Bidayuh as their mother tongue or first language (Norazuna, 2017).

There is a copious amount of academic research on various aspects of the Bidayuh language and culture, including code-switching (McLellan, 1992; McLellan & Nojeg, 2009), language planning (McLellan, 2002), vernacular education (McLellan & Campbell, 2015), language choice (Dealwis, 2008, 2010; Norazuna, 2010), and language vitality (Coluzzi et al., 2013). Eberhard et al. (2019) classify Bidayuh, particularly the three main varieties (Bidayuh-Bau, Bidayuh-Biatah, Bidayuh-Bukar-Sadong) as threatened. Based on previous research on the vitality of Bidayuh (see Coluzzi et al., 2013, 2017; Coluzzi, 2017), Coluzzi, Riget, and Kitade (2018) proposed it be

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¹ Indigenous languages of Malaysia other than Malay are the languages of the Orang Asli in Peninsular Malaysia and the indigenous people of Sabah and Sarawak (Asmah, 2017), such as the Kadazan and Bajau in Sabah, and the Iban and Bidayuh in Sarawak (as well as smaller languages such as Kelabit, discussed by Hemmings in this volume). Asmah (2004) suggests that of the 30 to 40 languages spoken in Sarawak at least 25 are indigenous languages, whereas in Sabah, 33 of 50 are indigenous.

categorized into two different levels on the EGIDS scale² (Lewis & Simons, 2010), namely level 6a Vigorous (inside the Bidayuh Belt), and level 7 Shifting (outside the Bidayuh Belt). Dealwis (2008) and Norazuna (2010) revealed that Bidayuh undergraduates, particularly those living in urban areas, are slowly shifting towards Malay and English. In contrast, Norazuna (2017) suggested that in terms of the number and concentration of speakers, the Bidayuh language is Safe, while a shift to Malay and English is a “socially motivated linguistic change” (Norazuna 2017, p. 42) whereby speakers adopt languages perceived to be prestigious in order to assume social identity in the larger community.

According to Smith and Smith (2017, p. 126), a number of indigenous minority language groups in Sabah and Sarawak are struggling to raise the status of their languages and maintain their cultures, due to intense pressure from the Malaysian national language policy of “one language for one nation”, i.e. the promotion of Malay to unify the country. There is also increasing dominance of English, associated with improved economic benefits. In fact, many educated Bidayuh, particularly those residing in the urban areas, inculcate the use of English at home as a language crucial for social mobility and economic advancement. In addition, Bidayuh is not the main language of choice in families of mixed marriages (Ting & Campbell, 2007). This unfortunately results in children being deprived of Bidayuh in the home setting, which is crucial for the transmission of community languages.

Other major factors of language endangerment, which are beyond the control of the Bidayuh community, are government and institutional language attitudes and policies toward community languages in general. Bidayuh is not used in education,³ mass media, or in local commerce and government. Compared to Iban in Sarawak and Kadazandusun in Sabah, Bidayuh is not taught as the *Pupil's Own Language* (POL)⁴ in the national education system. Iban, for instance, was used as medium of education in interior primary (Primary 1-4) schools until 1945 (Ariffin & Teoh, 1994). It was introduced in secondary schools in 1955 and offered as a subject in Sarawak Junior Certificate in 1957 (Ariffin & Teoh, 1994), while in 1963 the secondary school syllabus and curriculum were approved by the Sarawak State Legislative Council (Ariffin & Teoh, 1994). It

² Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS) (Lewis & Simons, 2010), derived from the GIDS of Fishman (1991), consists of 13 levels (from 0 to 10 with two sublevels a and b for levels 6 and 8) with higher numbers on the scale representing greater degrees of disruption to intergenerational transmission.

³ Except in the heritage language playschools under the Multilingual Education project (see Section 3.2 below)

⁴ Pupil's Own Language (POL) could be taught in schools if the parents desired it and there is a group of at least 15 students.

was first offered as an elective subject in the *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (SPM) in 2008, and its development programme received tremendous effort and support from the Dayak Cultural Foundation. In addition, Iban has less regional variation, while Bidayuh has four major dialects/varieties and many sub-dialects (see Section 2 below). Lower levels of regional variation has facilitated the standardization of Iban and its teaching in schools whereas for Bidayuh, there was no standardized orthography until 2003. Similarly, the Bidayuh people from different districts mostly use Standard Malay (*Bahasa Melayu*), Sarawak Malay, or English for intra-ethnic interaction. In the education domain, although Bidayuh was used in missionary schools in the rural areas during the Brooke era and also during the British colonial rule, this practice lapsed some years after Sarawak joined the Federation of Malaysia in 1963 (Ting & Campbell, 2017).

Aware of the impending threats to the survival of its language, the Bidayuh community (represented by the Dayak Bidayuh National Association or DBNA) has been taking steps to prevent further shift in collaboration with Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) Malaysia branch and UNESCO through projects such as the Bidayuh Language Development Preservation (BLDP) Project in 2002, and the Multilingual Education (MLE) Project in 2006. Other recent efforts to preserve the Bidayuh language among the younger generation initiated by DBNA include the Ethnic Language Curriculum (ELC) established in 2017. It is hoped that these projects can slow down the negative trend of shifting to Malay and English due to intermarriage, urbanization, language contact, language prestige, and the formal education system (Rensch, Rensch, Noeb, & Ridu, 2006). However, Smith and Smith (2017) report that most of the community-based efforts to develop and revitalise minority languages in Sarawak and Sabah are faced with challenges such as a lack of financial resources, lack of government recognition and support, and also a lack of appreciation, recognition and awareness amongst the community itself.

The main purpose of this article is to explore the effectiveness of the development and revitalisation efforts undertaken by the Bidayuh community in ensuring the reversal of language shift. To our knowledge, other than the article by McLellan and Campbell (2015) about teachers' and Bidayuh parents' perceptions towards the introduction of the language at the pre-school and primary school levels, and Smith and Smith (2017) on a general assessment of the development of indigenous languages in East Malaysia, no other previously conducted studies involved members of the Bidayuh community on this topic. We carried out interviews with representatives of the community to discover their perceptions towards these initiatives and to identify factors that might

contribute to their successes and/or failures. As Obiero (2010) affirmed, evaluation should become an integral part of a language revitalization programme (both at the set-up, and after the implementation stages) so that the goals, strategies, and approaches can be adjusted accordingly.

After a brief presentation on the Bidayuh community and language, this article presents the development and revitalisation projects undertaken thus far, with a special focus on the Bidayuh Language Development Preservation (BLDP) Project and the Multilingual Education (MLE) Project. Next, the methodology used in our research and the results obtained will be presented. The article closes with some general suggestions on how to improve the success of language revitalisation initiatives for Bidayuh.

2. The Bidayuh Community and Language

The Bidayuhs (or Land Dayaks) have a population of approximately 205,900 (*Buku Tahunan Perangkaan Sarawak*, 2014) and form the fourth largest ethnic group in Sarawak after the Ibans, Malays, and Chinese. The Bidayuhs mostly live in the Lundu, Bau, and Kuching districts (Kuching Division), and in the Serian district (Samarahan Division), situated at the western end of Sarawak (Rensch et al., 2006), or what is also known as the Bidayuh Belt (Dundon, 1989). Minos (2000) suggests that 90% of Bidayuhs remain in the Bidayuh Belt rural areas, however subsequently there has been continuous rural-urban migration to the capital city, Kuching, and other locations in Malaysia such as Miri, Kuala Lumpur, and Johor Bahru, mainly due to access to better job opportunities in these cities.

Traditionally, the Bidayuhs lived in longhouses along the hills and were involved primarily in hill paddy agriculture. Today, almost all families live in individual houses, with the majority of them, particularly those living in rural villages, still continuing with their agricultural activities. However, they are less involved in planting paddy growing are instead planting cash crops, such as rubber, cocoa, pepper and oil palm, as they provide better income. Over the years, with improved access to formal education, an increasing number of Bidayuhs have found employment in government offices or private businesses, mostly located in Kuching (Hood, 2006). However, Minos (2000) affirmed that the Bidayuh community is still economically disadvantaged in comparison to other groups in Malaysia, as only about 10% of Bidayuhs, primarily those who are well educated, work for the government or private sector, while only a handful practice professions such as medicine, law, or accountancy. Songan (2004) suggested that most low paying urban jobs,

such as odd job labourers, garbage collectors, construction workers, sales or coffee shop attendants are held by Bidayuhs, due to their lack of or low educational qualifications.

In terms of religious beliefs, the Bidayuhs were traditionally animists, however nowadays the majority are Christians, mostly belonging to the Catholic, Anglican, the Borneo Evangelical (SIB), Seventh Day Adventist (SDA), or Baptist Churches. The arrival of missionaries in Borneo in the 19th century during the Brooke Family era brought not only formal education and modern medicine but also Christianity. Conversion to Christianity has also resulted in the adoption of Christian names as well as Christmas celebration.

The Bidayuh language, earlier called Land Dayak (Hudson, 1970) has at least four major varieties, sometimes referred to as dialects (Asmah, 1987; Dundon, 1989; Nais, 1989). Some studies add a fifth dialect, namely Salako-Rara (Collins, 1993; Rensch, Rensch, Noeb, & Ridu, 2012), which is closer to Malay than other Bidayuh varieties. Hudson (1970) classified Salako-Rara as a Malayic language rather than Bidayuhic. The four major varieties are: Bidayuh Serian (traditionally called Bukar-Sadong), Bidayuh Bau (traditionally called Bau-Jagoi), Bidayuh Biatah (spoken in the Penrissen and Padawan areas), and Salako-Rara (in the outskirts of the Lundu District in the western part of Sarawak).

Not all of these varieties are mutually intelligible, and show clear pronunciation, lexical, and semantic differences. For example, mutual intelligibility between the Bau-Jagoi dialect and the Biatah dialect is relatively high,⁵ but most Bau-Jagoi or Biatah speakers find it almost impossible to communicate with speakers of the Bukar-Sadong dialects. Dundon (1989, p. 410) describes how forms in one dialect mean different things in other dialects. For example *bisaki* in Biatah means “how” whereas in Bukar-Sadong it means “making love”. The differences between the four main dialects often force Bidayuhs to resort to another language such as English or Malay for inter-dialect group interactions (Dealwis, 2008).

In addition, each major dialect has its own sub-dialects which may be defined by geographical boundaries and, most of the time, by village boundaries. Rensch et al. (2012) estimated there are 25 sub-dialects, while Chang (2002) mentioned 29 Bidayuh sub-groups. A recent work by Bongarra, Kayad, and Campbell (2017) has identified at least six Bidayuh language

⁵ Only the Biatah and the Bau-Jagoi varieties seem to be similar, with almost 70% of shared cognates, Rara on the other hand has less than 50% shared cognates with other Bidayuh varieties (Rensch et al., 2006: 223)

variations: Salako, Rara (Rara-Bakati'), Bau (Bau-Jagoi), Biatah, Tringgus/Semban, and Serian (Bukar-Sadung) (see Table 1).

Table 1: The six main Bidayuh dialects

Language	Dialects (not exhaustive)	District
Salako	-	Lundu
Rara	-	Lundu
Bidayuh Bau	Jagoi, Singai, Serebu, Bratak, Gumbang	Bau, Lundu, Padawan
Bidayuh Biatah	Biatah, Bibenuk, Bipuruh, Bistaang, Disapug, Pinyawa', Biya and others	Penriseen and Padawan
Tringgus/Sembaan	Sembaan, Tringgus Raya, Tringgus Bireng	Bau, Penrissen and Padawan
Bidayuh Serian	Bukar, Sadung, Tebakang, Sadung Bunan, Sangking and Mentu Tapuh	Serian

(Adapted from Bonggara, Kayad, & Campbell, 2017, p. 217)

Currently, Bidayuh is mainly used as the everyday language in low domains, particularly within families in rural settings, and is still widely used in the religious domain, especially during prayer services. Prayer books, the Bible, and hymns have been written in the different Bidayuh dialects by the Christian missionaries. The language is also used in limited ways in radio programmes,⁶ and also on web pages and social media (blogs, Facebook, YouTube), as discussed by McLellan (2016). The typical linguistic repertoire of Bidayuh in Sarawak is summarized in Table 2.

⁶ Radio programs in the different Bidayuh dialects are broadcast by Radio Sarawak (RTM) nine hours daily (Rensch et al. 2006) and also on WAI FM at [https://myklik.rtm.gov.my/radio/WAI_fm_\(Bidayuh--Kayan\)?r=regional](https://myklik.rtm.gov.my/radio/WAI_fm_(Bidayuh--Kayan)?r=regional).

Table 2: The Bidayuh linguistic repertoire

Language	Practical and symbolic functions
English	inter-ethnic communication, intra-ethnic communication (mainly young, educated and urban Bidayuhs), economic opportunities, modernity, Christianity
Standard Malay (<i>Bahasa Melayu</i>)	inter-ethnic communication, economic opportunities, national identity
Sarawak Malay (<i>Melayu Sarawak</i>)	inter-ethnic communication, intra-ethnic communication (mainly urban Bidayuhs), local identity
Bidayuh	intra-ethnic communication, ethnic identity

3. Community Development and Revitalisation Initiatives⁷

One of the earliest efforts to record indigenous languages in Sarawak was undertaken by Christian missionaries and administrators during the Brooke and colonial times in the form of collecting wordlists, primarily to develop the Christian faith and ensure the general welfare of the people. Some of the first reading materials produced in Bidayuh were religious books, including a translation of the New Testament into the Biatah dialect by Rev. Fr. Peter H.H. Howes in 1963.

Since the various Bidayuh areas were distant from one another, different denominations and missions focused on particular areas and worked separately to develop local materials, written in different orthographies, resulting in different written forms of Bidayuh varieties.

After the formation of Malaysia in 1963, language development efforts were mainly undertaken by the Borneo Literature Bureau (BLB) which had been established on 15 September 1959 to encourage writing and publication of non-church material in the peoples' own languages. BLB also helped to commercialize local books, provide technical services, as well as encourage and popularize the use of standard Malay (Bahasa Malaysia) at the time (Noeb & Ridu, 2017). BLB recorded and collected materials on the local languages and terminologies as part of an effort to include these terminologies and enrich Bahasa Malaysia. A number of Bidayuh books were

⁷ This section is based mainly on Rensch et al. (2006, 2012) and Noeb & Ridu (2017).

published under BLB, including eight storybooks in Biatah, Jagoi and Bukar, two phrasebooks in Bau and Biatah, and a collection of traditional stories in Jagoi.

In 1977, BLB ceased to operate when the national language body Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (DBP) opened its branches in Sabah and Sarawak; DBP at that time focused more on promoting and developing Bahasa Malaysia. This was the government's policy to unite Malaysia through a common language, and to create the spirit of nationalism.

The body that has played a very important role in the preservation and revitalization of the Bidayuh language and culture after the formation of Malaysia is the Dayak Bidayuh National Association (DBNA). It was first established as the Bidayuh National Association (BNA) on 22 September 1955 by Ahguan Guga, Helbourne Simigat, Wesley Haron Timor, and Augustine Sirau with the goal of ensuring that the Bidayuhs remain united so that they would not be exploited and disadvantaged in the process of obtaining development. Today, DBNA focuses mainly on seven key areas which are important for the development of the Bidayuhs, including education, language, heritage, and culture.

3.1 Bidayuh Language Development Project (BLDP)

One of the biggest language development efforts to be undertaken by the Dayak Bidayuh National Association (DBNA) is the Bidayuh Language Development Project (BLDP), carried out with the help of the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL). BLDP began in January 2001 after permission was granted by the Sarawak State Planning Unit in December 2000 (Noeb & Ridu, 2017); its main aim is to help preserve and promote the Bidayuh language among the Bidayuh community. In order to achieve this, BLDP has established four main goals (Noeb & Ridu, 2017, p. 29):

1. to revitalize the language, especially forgotten and neglected terms;
2. to develop a unified orthography for all the different Bidayuh dialects;
3. to expand the body of Bidayuh literature; and
4. to facilitate the teaching of Bidayuh as a subject in public schools.

Between January 2001 and the present, DBNA and SIL have conducted a number of projects in pursuit of the aims and goals of BLDP. One major and pioneer project involves the collection, documentation, and linguistic research of Bidayuh from various areas, with considerable outputs, including phonological, grammatical, and semantic analyses. One of the main achievements has been the establishment of a unified orthography for vowels in August 2003, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Orthographies for Bidayuh vowels

Pronunciation	Current Spelling			Unified Spelling	
	Bau	Kuching	Serian	Proposed	Decided
[a]	a	a	a	a	a
[ə]/[ʌ]	----	a	a	e	e
[iə]/[ɛ]	ie	e	e	é	é
[i]	i	i	i	i	i
[uə]/[ə]	uo	o	o	o	o
[ɔ]/[u]	o	ū	u (ū/û)	∅ or ū/û	ū
[u]	u	u	u	u	u

Source: Noeb & Ridu (2017)

A number of workshops were organised to help achieve the aims and goals of BLDP, including the Learning that LASTS (LtL) workshops, which set out to recruit and train Bidayuhs to write, compile, publish, and distribute materials in the language. DBNA and SIL also organized a Curriculum Development Seminar to help develop a curriculum and teaching and learning materials for the introduction of Bidayuh in schools. Several dictionary-making workshops, which began in 2003, were also conducted to compile records of Bidayuh vocabulary, especially items which were known to have been forgotten and neglected. From the dictionary workshops, picture dictionaries and wordlists for each of the four Bidayuh major varieties/dialects were published and are now being used as references. BLDP has had many achievements but there is still much to be done to ensure that the language is used by younger generations, especially within the multiracial and multilingual context of Malaysia, where Bahasa Melayu and English are widely used as the mediums of communication. As an extension of BLDP, another new major project was introduced, namely Multilingual Education (MLE).

3.2 Multilingual Education (MLE)

In 2006, as part of the “Education for All” Program in Asia, UNESCO signed a contract with DBNA to conduct a Multilingual Education (MLE) pilot project, with help from the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL). The aim of MLE is:

to empower children in minority language communities to learn well in the languages of wider communications without having to sacrifice their own language and culture...The Bidayuh MLE programmes puts an emphasis on the Bidayuh cultural heritage through stories, songs, dances, arts and crafts, and teaching on culturally important topics. Where

possible, members of the older generation come to the classroom to teach music, dance and crafts. Parents are also encouraged to participate in looking after the young children. (Noeb & Ridu 2017, p. 38-39)

In 2007, MLE was first introduced in seven playschools for children aged three and four years in selected villages in the Bau, Serian, Kuching/Penrissen, and Lundu districts. In 2009, five MLE kindergartens, for children aged five were opened; three more playschools were started in new villages in 2010. In these pre-schools, or *Sikulah Piramin* in Bidayuh, all subjects are taught in Bidayuh, except *Bahasa Melayu*. The philosophy behind MLE is that by learning in their own language, Bidayuh children will be able to perform better as they begin their formal education, as well as to retain their cultural identity and heritage.

MLE is also seen as a platform to provide a firm base for Bidayuh children and “a head start in their education by starting education in their mother tongues, then gradually introducing Bahasa Malaysian and English” (Joyik, Siam, Tan, Bongarra, & Simpson, 2017, p. 73). The MLE in Sarawak is also known as First Language-Based Multilingual Education (FLB MLE), or Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB MLE), which is:

a curriculum and teaching methodology that begins with the learners’ first language as a medium of instruction and builds good bridges to other languages (Bahasa Malaysia [sic] and English, in the Malaysian context), while maintaining the use of the first language for as long as possible. (Joyik et al., 2017, p. 70)

Currently, the MLE pilot project has been established in three stages:

- Stage 1 – MLE playschools for three- to four-year olds which are conducted in Bidayuh language entirely;
- Stage 2 – MLE Kindergarten Year 1 for five-year olds. These are children who have undergone MLE playschool, and are taught all subjects in Bidayuh except for *Bahasa Melayu* which is introduced orally through games and activities;
- Stage 3 – MLE Kindergarten Year 2 for six-year olds. This stage is still being developed by DBNA where English will be introduced orally.

DBNA is also planning a fourth stage, the Ethnic Language Curriculum, discussed in Section 3.3. As of 2017, there are eight playschools and three kindergartens in different Bidayuh areas as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Playschools and kindergartens under the MLE project

Location	Variety of Bidayuh	Playschools 3-4 years, year established	Kindergarten 5 years	Number of trained teachers
Benuk	Biatah	One, 2007 for 4-year-old children	One, established 2009	2
Sinjok	Biatah	One, 2010	One, established 2012	2
Apar	Bau-Singai	One, 2007	One, established 2009, closed in 2016	2 (1 left)
Pasir Hilir in Lundu	Rara	One, 2007 for 3- to 6-year-old children	None	1 (different teachers over the years)
Kpg Serasot, Bau	Bau	One, 2016	None	1
Kpg Bogag, Bau	Bau	One, 2016	None	1
Gahat Mawang, Serian	Serian	One, 2016	None	1
Bunan Gega, Serian	Serian	One, 2016	None	1

Source: Ting & Campbell (2017, p. 131)

3.3 The Ethnic Language Curriculum (ELC)

The Ethnic Language Curriculum (ELC), also known as *Kurikulum Bahasa Etnik* (KBE) in Malay, is a “curriculum designed as a template for using any ethnic language for learning, critical thinking and communication in the formal classroom setting” (Kayad & Arritt, 2017 in Bonggara & Josak Siam, 2017, p. 91). The ELC has been created to achieve the goal of introducing Bidayuh in the formal education system as well as helping other ethnic groups to use their own languages in education.

With the main goals of “preserving cultural identity, assisting children in literacy, broadening the use of different ethnic languages and adding more ethnic languages taught as subjects in the education system” (Bonggara & Josak Siam, 2017, p. 91), ELC combines the curriculum of MLE with the teaching approach of KSSR (the government curriculum standards). At the present time, ELC has developed a curriculum and materials which include teaching and learning texts for Primary One language classes for native speakers in the three major Bidayuh varieties of Bau, Biatah and Serian. A pilot study (January to June 2018) was conducted with the permission and

guidance of the Malaysian Ministry of Education in six primary schools in the Bau, Penrissen and Serian districts where the majority are Bidayuh children.

4. Methodology

This small-scale research project is based on qualitative data obtained through semi-structured interviews with five Bidayuh representatives, with the aim of examining their perceptions of the effectiveness of reversing language shift through the community based Bidayuh Language Development Preservation (BLDP) Project, with a special focus on the Multilingual Education (MLE) Project. As the focus of the evaluation was on the objectives, strategies, and approaches employed in these development and revitalization projects, the interviewees selected were either involved in or familiar with BLDP and MLE and who could help to identify the factors which might have contributed to the successes and/or failures of the projects. However, due to the small number of interviewees and the possible subjectivity of their responses, no claims are being made that the results reflect the views of the whole Bidayuh community about the two projects. Semi-structured interview sessions were conducted orally and via email in English, Malay, and/or Bidayuh. The details of the five interviewees are shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Interviewee information

Interviewee	Gender	Age	Project(s) involved and/or familiar with (BLDP/MLE/ELC)
Respondent A	M	70	BLDP/MLE/ELC
Respondent B	F	42	BLDP/ELC
Respondent C	F	45	BLDP/MLE
Respondent D	M	48	BLDP/MLE/ELC
Respondent E	F	49	BLDP/MLE/ELC

5. Findings

This section discusses the findings of our study based on the interview data from five representatives who were directly involved with BLDP and MLE. At present, out of the eight playschools which were running in 2017, only four are still operating (Benuk and Sinjok in the Padawan District, Bogag in Bau, and Gahat Mawang in Serian). The other four closed down due to low enrolments and poor community support. According to the interview data, the most

successful playschools were those in the Padawan District, namely Benuk and Sinjok. The community in these two areas were very supportive and have helped and volunteered whenever necessary.

It seems that poor community support is one of the main factors that led to the closure the Bidayuh playschools (*Sikulah Piramin*). Parents preferred to send their children to KEMAS (Community Development Department) playschools rather than *Sikulah Piramin*, even though there was provision of the costs of transportation, food, and uniforms borne by DBNA; there were also no tuition fees. Because these *Sikulah Piramin* were not recognized by the government, parents preferred to send their children to a government funded KEMAS kindergarten. As respondent C reported:

Dahlah sua ditanggung oleh persatuan. Transport disediakan. Makanan free disediakan. Lagi oggi bojuh piramin. Dik perlu bayar yuran setiap buran koda' KEMAS. Tapi disebabkan sekolah tih doik diiktraf government noh ngan doik nyaa skia percaya.

Everything is borne by the association. Transport was provided. Free food was provided. As well as free uniforms. There was no need to pay for fees like KEMAS. But because this school is not recognized by the government that is why people don't really believe in it.

This was echoed by respondent D, who felt that the lack of government support and official approval have led to the decrease in the number of students enrolling in the playschools:

MLE providers should also get approval from the authorities concerned. If not registered, parents may think twice about sending their children there.

The lack of government support has therefore made it difficult for these schools to operate and to gain the trust of the people. MLE itself is an independent initiative by DBNA to help revive the Bidayuh language. Although there was some resistance from the community at first, the project was carried out using funding from UNESCO. Currently, finance is another major factor that is holding back the development of the playschools. Ever since their inception in 2008, the playschools have been surviving on funds from UNESCO, with parents and the community volunteering as teachers. However, as time passed, the teachers were paid but salaries were rather

low. Therefore, DBNA had to find other sources of financial support, one of which is the government. Respondent B commented:

We need the government to recognize and support this initiative by providing annual grants for the teacher's salary.

In terms of the objectives (described in Section 3.2), there were mixed reactions.

Respondent A noted that the objectives were met and that:

children have acquired the basic skills in reading, writing, and are able to do addition and subtraction. Socially, they are ready to enter primary one. Their mother tongue vocabulary is better than those who do not go through the MLE program.

However, it appears that not all parents and even teachers understand the true objectives of MLE; most believe that introducing Bidayuh would not benefit their children. This observation coincided with the findings in McLellan and Campbell's (2015) paper which showed that parents were more positive about sending their children to government-funded, Bahasa Melayu-based kindergartens or even English-based ones, believing their children would benefit more in the future. They did not see the relevance of teaching their children their own native language, as emphasised by Respondent D:

My opinion is that the community may not have a clear-cut understanding of the connection between MLE and learning the Bidayuh language. This can be explained through workshops or seminars.

Despite the number of workshops, talks, and seminars done by the DBNA on MLE, most parents may still not understand the concepts, objectives, and significance of the approach.

Some other challenges include the provision of classrooms, teaching equipment, and teacher training. Most of the *Sikulah Piramin* were set up in Bidayuh villages in rural and semi-rural areas resulting in a lack of teaching and learning facilities for the schools as a whole. Again, funding for these facilities were provided by UNESCO or DBNA and was thus limited. Most of the teaching materials were developed by DBNA with the help from SIL which conducted

workshops with the communities to guide them on how to prepare materials as well as contributing ideas. However, our interview with one of the respondents suggested that there might be some shortcomings in the materials developed. For instance, the focus of the playschool was basically on word recognition rather than the meanings of the words, and hence the emphasis on memorizing the spelling system.

Even so, Respondent D was positive that these materials could be developed and improved over time:

If there is no dictionary yet, we write one. If this is insufficient literature, we produce more.

All can be done with many people working together to achieve an ultimate goal.

With support from other organizations such as Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) and Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (DBP), as well as individuals who are keen to see MLE advance, these materials could be developed and produced.

Another pressing issue within the Bidayuh community is the problem of the four Bidayuh varieties, especially now that DBNA is going towards implementing KBE in schools. It has been a long-debated issue that Bidayuhs in different areas prefer to have their own variety taught in schools. This was not a major problem for MLE but at the primary school it is an issue.

6. Concluding Remarks

This article has focused on Bidayuh language development and revitalization initiatives, particularly on those undertaken by the Dayak Bidayuh National Association (DBNA). The outcomes of the Multilingual Education (MLE) project, particularly the Bidayuh playschools (*Sikulah Piramin*) was the major focus of this article, with interviews showing that there were many challenges that have emerged ever since the initiation of MLE in 2006. The greatest of all was a lack of support from the community, which in some cases resulted in the playschools being closed down. Parents preferred to send their children to government kindergartens (TASKA KEMAS). This could be due to a lack of understanding among parents about the concepts, objectives, and significance of MLE, particularly for Bidayuh. In addition, the lack of government support was another factor. Since the playschools were operated using funds from UNESCO and DBNA which were limited, additional financial help was needed to run the schools, pay the

teachers, and provide proper classrooms and teaching equipment. Recognition from the government also contributed to the parents' lack of confidence in sending their children to the *Sikulah Piramin*. There were a number of teaching and learning materials developed by DBNA and the community, however there was still room for improvement.

Language Revitalisation Programmes need to consider many factors in order to succeed. They require thorough planning beforehand, including a diagnosis of the state of the language to ensure that an intervention program can be appropriately designed (see also Obiero, 2010; Walsh, 2010). There is a need for a proper evaluation of the MLE programme, taking into account the challenges and factors affecting it, as well as the opinions and perspectives of stakeholders, especially the parents and children. It would help if the government is supportive, especially of the introduction of ethnic languages in the formal education system to preserve languages and cultures. It should involve joint collaboration between the government, communities, and NGOs, particularly when the initiatives aim for sustainability and official recognition.

To conclude, BLDP and MLE are two examples of “bottom-up” indigenous language development and revitalization initiatives which have more or less been successful in attracting the attention of some members of the Bidayuh community as well as making people reflect on the future of the Bidayuh language and culture. However, they have been less successful in gaining the support of the Malaysian authorities and the majority of community members. Further work needs to be done to see Bidayuh more strongly supported.

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