

Educational Aspirations Among The Penan Children: An Exploratory Study At Lower Tinjar, Baram

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Abstract

Problems of education among a small settled population of a nomadic Penan tribe that lives in Lower Tinjar, Baram Sarawak, have been assessed. Families chosen for the study reside in three long houses. The main focus of the study was to explore the educational problems and aspirations among the children of this population. Do the children lack the necessary aspirations or motivation? Do teachers and parents provide adequate encouragement? To what extent the environment at schools is responsible for students' aspiration towards education? Answers to these questions were sought by conducting a survey and interviews with teachers, parents and pupils. Information thus obtained was corroborated with the data obtained by looking into (a) the level of education among the members of households (b) parental influences on the education of the children (c) educational awareness among the students, (d) students interest towards education, (e) what are the educational support available and (f) the subject interest among the students. Lack of parental 'roles', commuting problems caused by long distances between schools and homes were some of the source of the problems identified. Lack of schools in their own residential areas - especially secondary schools, poor road conditions and travel facilities were contributing factors for the poor education among these children. Besides, a low aspiration among pupils especially at primary level also contributes to high dropout rates. Confinement to hostels with no opportunity to visit homes for long periods made the young ones homesick. Perhaps many of the problems encountered were not very different from other similar societies but certainly they were much more intense. Nevertheless, in spite of several difficulties some reasons have been found to be hopeful for the future. For instance, many students were happy to be at school; there were no indications of racial prejudice. They were aware of the value of good education as they grew up. However, many parents seem to need some 'education' in this regard. Teachers were doing their best under the existing

constraints of time and resources. After critically evaluating the data, some practical suggestions to improve the situation will be made in the last section of the paper.

Keywords: Penan, education, rural population, awareness, literacy