

IBAN Language in National Education: Issues and Challenges

Winnie anak Antau, Khairul Azhar Jamaludin
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

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Abstract

The Iban language subject is an additional subject or known as an ethnic language that is taught in primary and secondary schools. This study aims to examine the issues and challenges faced by teachers and students in the teaching and learning process of the Iban language subject in national education. The findings of the study show that there are issues and challenges faced by teachers and students in the teaching and learning of the Iban language, such as the influence of social media on student work, problems of poor understanding in literary learning, feelings of inferiority among Iban language teachers and learning methods. which is influenced by the Iban culture. Therefore, with the disclosure made in this study, it can help those who are directly and indirectly involved in the teaching and learning process of Iban language join hands to ensure that this ethnic subject develops in parallel with the position of other ethnic subjects in the national education system.

Keywords: Issues, Challenges, The Iban Language Subject, National Education

Introduction

Malaysia has a diverse society but lives in peace and harmony. There are several majority races in Malaysia. Among them are the Malays, Chinese, Indians, Bumiputera's of Sabah, and Bumiputera's of Sarawak. So, Malaysia is famous for the uniqueness of its race and ethnicity including festivals, language and food and many other things that stand out about Malaysia. One race that is highlighted in the article about the Iban is the majority race in Sarawak (Sarawak Government Official Portal, 2010) who live in lowland or highland areas, inland and rural areas. For C.A. Bamfylde (1898), he said that this ethnic group is a homogenous race that is of the same type and does not involve many tribes. The Iban people use the same language to communicate with each other despite the different delivery methods in each district in Sarawak. In addition, they are also rich in trust and team spirit in all matters, have high respect for guests and inherit uniqueness in terms of cultural language, customs, and culture. Nevertheless, the way of interacting among the Iban people also has its own creativity where there is various slang heard in every district in Sarawak. The northern part of Sarawak includes parts of Limbang, Miri and Bintulu while the central part includes Sibu, Kapit, Mukah, Dalat, Song and the next part is Sarikei, Sri Aman and Kuching. Each of these sections conveys a different language, for example, for the Kapit section, they tend to use harsh words in daily

communication, but the intention is good even if it is sometimes unpleasant to hear, while the Sri Aman section speaks softly and is very polite.

Background of the Iban Language

The subject of Iban language began to gain a foothold in Sarawak since Brooke's reign and was taught in Christian missionary schools. Under the Education Act, it is an elective subject in primary and secondary schools. This writing is about the position of the Iban language subject in national education including the issues and challenges faced by this subject from the past, now and in the future. The first school that made the Iban language a mother tongue in teaching and learning was in the Iban settlement in Sarawak. The school in question is St. Paul which was created by Anglican missionaries in 1856. Prof Derek Freeman studied the Iban language and called the Iban language the 'Master of Language'. In his study, he stated that the Iban people are smart in choosing and arranging sentences that sound the same as poetry and phrases in English. Conclusion from this, Iban language is a uniform or homogenous language.

The Iban language subject is a language subject that is widely studied, perhaps because the Iban people are the largest inhabitants in Sarawak compared to the Kadazan Dusun or Semai languages (Ethnic Language Unit, Curriculum Development Center 2010). So, these three ethnic languages are offered in government schools in addition to Malay, Chinese and Tamil. The history of the development of the Iban language or *Jaku Iban* can be traced back to four periods, namely the Brooke era, the British Colonial era, the transition period to the national education system and the period after the Education Act 1996. Jaku Iban was first taught at St Paul's School which is an Anglican missionary school in Banting in the year 1853. As for the writing system, the Iban people use a writing system known as '*Turai*'. It will be used by the Iban *lemambang* to scribble about the gods on a piece of board when celebrating *Gawai* Day. This script contains approximately 59 letters of the alphabet that have the same sound pronunciation as the Roman script. This writing has been established for 15 generations and records the important history of the Iban people called '*Pirate of Beting Maro*', which is a sign of success defeating the enemy through the attack of '*Ngayau*'. This act means the hero returning home with the severed head of the enemy.

Development of the Iban language

In this modern century, the Iban language is no stranger to the national education system. The Iban language is used as a communication language in channeling ideas and views among its speakers. They communicate with each other as well as those who use Iban as a second language in their mediation and this shows the level of development of this language has moved forward in parallel with the goals of its users. Furthermore, the Iban people who use this language have the same values, traditions, beliefs, and customs as other people. In the education system, the subject of Iban language was first introduced as a subject in secondary schools (Department of Education Sarawak 1964). This subject measure was approved by the State Legislative Assembly before the formation of Malaysia. According to the document, this subject is specifically for Iban students and not for students who make this language their second language in their daily lives. In the past, the teaching and learning of this subject focused more on the correct skills in terms of pronunciation, writing, grammar to parallel the mastery and knowledge of the history, culture, arts, and literature of the Iban people. On 13 May 1987, the Director of Education Sarawak issued a circular letter (Circular JPN35/JP/1585/1987) about the permission to teach this subject in primary schools and make

it a KBSM subject but it is not an exam subject for UPSR and it causes textbooks not published at this time but courses to assist teachers in teaching and learning are conducted even though there is no provision provided. In 1992, the Iban language was first proposed by the Sarawak Department of Education to be introduced as an upper secondary subject but was not given a response by the Malaysian Ministry of Education since this subject is not a subject in the national education system due to not being included in the Education Act 1961. Following the issue, a unit that manages the teaching and learning of ethnic languages was created through the Post-Education Act 1996 in the Curriculum Development Division, Ministry of Education Malaysia. Now, this ethnic language can be offered based on the request of parents, sufficient teachers and the ability of financial allocations have been prepared to accommodate any needs of the committee along with other subjects. The first university to offer this subject as a minor subject at a higher level is Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris. In the July 2010/2011 intake of the university, a total of 20 students studied the Iban language and Dr Chemaline was appointed as the first Iban Language Program Coordinator at that time. Meanwhile, this ethnic subject is also offered at the Teacher Education Institute and UNIMAS. With this, it is hoped that the shortage of option teachers can be covered, where the issue of non-option teachers who teach is not a stale issue in the Ministry of Education.

In terms of communication, Iban language has been used in RTM which is named as Wai FM and private radio Cats FM which acts as a transmitter of information throughout Sarawak. It is not a miracle when people other than the Iban can understand and even speak fluently this ethnic language. While Iban magazines also exist such as *Pegari Magazine*, *Sempandai Magazine*, *Tebilang* to further strengthen the development of the Iban language in the same publishing section as other languages. Don't miss out on internet technology with the use of blogs such as *Sepating Bungai* to talk about various information about the Iban people including history, culture, current issues and much more. This makes it easier for users who want to find information about this ethnicity. So, it is proven through this blog that it helps to promote and correct any misunderstandings among the community and people outside the state of Sarawak.

Next, in the field of entertainment, there is also music and songs such as songs in other languages. The singers also uploaded the song on YouTube, and it was well received by the fans and had a lot of views. This language is also active in the TikTok application. So, this language is not far behind as thought and it is not impossible that one day it will be in line with other languages and be of interest to individuals who like to improve their language skills. If analyzed carefully in the future, it will be proven that there is an increase in terms of the number and quality of speaking among non-Iban people.

Second Language Teaching Theory

There are several theories that have been revealed for learning a second language. First is the learning theory of behaviorism founded by Bloomfield and the psychologist involved in the same is Skinner. This theory is related to the ability to speak naturally with effective stimulation and repeated repetitions. This is because humans do have a natural nature and perfect equipment to learn languages. The second theory is the theory of constructivism that started in the 1980s. This theory examines learning as the production of knowledge and learning will occur if the student is involved in actively seeking knowledge regularly in working memory. For Mayer (1999), he described students as creators of sense while teachers are cognitive guides. The constructivist approach to explaining the learning experience is something that: related to the real world requires students to determine tasks and subtasks

to complete activities allowing students to review tasks and deliverables from different perspectives provide opportunities to work together enable competition to create solutions and multiple outcomes aimed at creating polished products or work-related tools of great value.

Next is about cognitive theory, which is a theory that leads to human style that is the motivation to act according to human thinking. The theory places great importance on experience as an effective tool to stimulate past memory and will directly affect the individual's learning more efficiently. As for the level of understanding, people will change their understanding according to different forms, give ideas using their own understanding and translate ideas and give examples and drafts. The advantage of this theory is that individuals can remember something in their memory and apply it in solving an issue.

For Bilingualism Theory (Bilingualism), which means native speakers master two languages (Homberger & Baker, 2001) and this theory is managed by Bloomfield. This theory highlights four basic dimensions which are listening, reading, writing, and speaking. The fifth basic dimension in language is thinking. In fact, there is a difference between bilingualism as an individual possession and bilingualism with two or more languages operating in a group, community, state, or country. First it is known as bilingual individual and second as social bilingual. At the individual level, there are two differences that can be observed, which are related to a person's ability in two languages and the use of those languages. For Jim Cummins (2000), he used the image of an 'iceberg' to describe how the bilingual brain works. According to Jim Cummins, at the top of the "iceberg", the first and second languages are seen as separate. However, these surface characteristics are based on the same underwater which is the same level of efficiency. This competence is the knowledge and experience they must express their thoughts regardless of the language they choose to communicate in bilingualism. Cummins also claims that an individual develops two types of language skills: Basic Interpersonal Language Skills (BISC) and Cognitive Academic Language Skills (CALP). While basic interpersonal language skills can be acquired in 1 to 2 years, the level of skills needed to deal with academic contexts takes 5 to 7 years to develop.

Review of Previous Studies

Basically, learning a language has the same goal or purpose, which is that students can master several skills such as listening, speaking, writing, and reading. If the student can master all these skills, it will allow the individual to form a precise understanding. It is also core to individuals who want to master the standard language. There are several past studies related to this subject at a secondary or higher level. Among the topics related to this learning style include motivation, cultural influence, pedagogy among teachers and non-optional teaching staff.

According to Rosita & Ruhizan (2021) show that there is no significant difference between the attitudes of male and female students towards KBAT in learning the Iban language. This means that gender does not play a role in students' attitudes in learning the Iban language. However, the researcher emphasized the importance of KBAT in learning this ethnic subject through creative teaching staff to obtain optimal results.

For Magdeline & Zamrie (2014) concluded that there is no significant difference between experienced teachers and new teachers in influencing the level of student mastery in this ethnic subject. They found that new teachers are wise to apply information technology in their teaching and learning process while experienced teachers prioritize group work.

Different ways among teachers but the same goal which is to help students achieve the level of mastery a student should master.

For Shirley & Ruhizan (2022), they found that students were enthusiastic and highly motivated to learn Iban language grammar using PowToon animation videos. To implement this lesson, the teacher needs to learn about the filters found in this animation so that it can be done effectively.

In conclusion, based on the previous studies above, it can be concluded that the learning style of students taking this subject is not influenced by the teaching staff or the new learning system introduced by the ministry. It is closely related to the discipline of the individual himself in learning this subject including efforts such as revision, virtual learning with experts and a deep interest in mastering the language. In addition, the role of parents and peers are also part of the factors that contribute to excellent mastery among students of this ethnic subject.

Although the study of Iban language has existed in this modern era, there are still some constraints that need to be overcome to be in line with other ethnic subjects in the national system. The issues and challenges faced by students include those related to social media, literature, Iban culture and the dumping of non-optional teachers who teach Iban. Therefore, this study is important to review the issues and challenges faced by teachers and their students so that they do not become destitute and have an impact on this subject in the future. Some of the intended issues and challenges are as found in the following previous studies.

Iban Language Issues and Challenges

Issues among teachers

In the education system there are always gaps that need to be overcome from time to time. Same with the Iban language which has its own issues and challenges. There are some issues and challenges faced by this ethnic subject, among which is that teachers are not an option to teach Iban. This happened due to the lack of Iban language teachers. So, teachers from options other than Iban will be invited to teach Iban.

According to Sarawak Teachers' Union (STU) President Adam Prakash Abdullah, responded to the allegation that there are very few Iban teachers and advised the Sarawak Dayak Thinkers' Association (DTTAS) to refer to the Sarawak NRD so that authentic data can be obtained. The DTTAS expressed concern that Sarawak will lack teachers of this ethnic subject if the teachers who are serving will retire soon. The issue of teachers not being an option is not a new problem, but it is a stale case not only for this subject, but other subjects also face the same issue. Another reason for this is that Iban language courses are not offered in all institutes of higher learning and this situation does not accommodate existing teachers.

In addition, the current era is more sophisticated and changes in terms of the use of information technology are very fast and modern. This gave old teachers a challenge to get used to something new and the ministry also had to cover the cost of training teachers to keep up with new teachers considering the many benefits of using information technology. Among them, this method can attract students' interest in learning the Iban language as well as increase the motivation of the students involved as well. Among the information technologies that need to be applied is PowToon animation. (Shirley & Ruhizan 2022).

According to Emily et. al (2021), their study concludes that the level of knowledge of teachers who teach Iban language regarding the use of multimedia in teaching is at a high level. This

shows that the teachers who teach Iban also always keep up with current developments and have exposure related to information about multimedia.

Furthermore, Iban language educators lack reference materials. Magdeline & Zamri (2012) found that the lack of reference materials is the main problem of Iban teachers. However, these teachers try to find their own initiative for the sake of the students and the teaching process can be done smoothly and achieve the planned objectives. For experienced teachers, they use analogies in the delivery of their teaching content. Additional textbooks used are materials that have been published for a long time and miss the latest issues. So, indirectly it is very difficult to attract the interest of students to cooperate in the learning and teaching process in the classroom. Printed materials are more for entertainment and not academic.

Issues among students

Some of the issues faced by students is that they think Iban language is their mother tongue and does not need to be learned. For them, this subject has been mastered. (Magdeline anak Nor et al. (2012). The issue of the 'messaging' language used by students in their writing is at a worrying level. Examples of words used are *enggai* (don't want) to become *ngai* and *enggau* (and) turns into *ngau*. They confused the correct use of Iban language and market language. According to Saripah Banseng and Roselind Sandai (2017), the lack of emphasis from knowledgeable elders in this *sampi* makes many of today's young generation have trouble in understanding the metaphorical language found in *sampi*.

Higher-order thinking skills (HOTs) have become a priority in today's learning, especially in questioning in teaching and exams. The Iban language is one of the subjects that elevates the mother tongue as a scientific language. However, students' HOTs proficiency in Iban language is at a weak level. (Rosita Kunyo & Ruhizan Mohd Yasin, 2021).

Iban Language Challenge

Challenges among teachers

A challenge that is not new among educators, especially in rural areas or rural areas, is about infrastructure facilities. Lack of infrastructure facilities is one of the familiar issues in Sarawak. But this does not play a role in this subject. The problem that arises is that the class often moves around since this subject is taught outside the congregation. This kind of situation causes teachers and students to be unmotivated to learn. Teachers feel burdened by teaching outside the assembly and feel inferior considering that this subject is not as popular as Science and Mathematics subjects. The problem of the school not having electricity and a good internet network is one of the factors that contribute to this issue. (Magdeline Nor & Zamri 2012).

Many Iban language teachers have difficulty interpreting the meaning of parables, making teaching, and learning less successful because the use of parables is less and less used in the Iban community today. (Saripah Banseng and Doratya Gerry, 2022).

In addition, the attitude of teachers and students towards the Iban language is also one of the challenges of the Iban language. Many look down on this subject because it is not as famous as the Science and Mathematics subjects. Teachers often refuse if offered to teach this subject due to the issue. The clash of multiple languages is also a challenge among Iban language teachers. According to Magdeline anak Nor et al. (2012), the factor of mixing Iban and other languages also affects the direction of Iban language teaching in the future. The Iban people find it difficult to identify the proper Iban language with the Iban language of the market.

Through teaching this subject in the hope that it can convey the correct language to the local community.

In addition, lack of exposure to Iban literature causes teachers to face difficulties in teaching literature or carelessness such as poems due to lack of exposure to this material. The teachers find their own initiative with materials and guides to teach such as understanding the words used. Words that are difficult to understand because they are not used in daily communication. In conclusion, the Iban language subject should be given the same importance as other ethnic subjects so that it is not foreign and lagging in terms of reference books, exposure to information technology and infrastructure. All parties play a role in achieving the maximum objective.

Challenges among Students

For students, no major challenges were identified in previous studies. Magdeline anak Nor et. al (2012), they found that students were confused by the clash of everyday language or 'market' language in their writing. No doubt they have problems with reference books like teachers. Reference books are very limited and are only guided by the modules provided by the subject teachers as well as examination papers from previous years.

Next, students have problems with grammar and vocabulary in the essay. This contributes to the lack of motivation among them to write essays. (Lidya Jakarta and Khairul Azhar Jamaludin, 2022). So, their study focused on language learning strategies to help the students with the problem.

Next, students' learning style is influenced by Iban culture. This study shows that culture inherited from ancestors can influence students if practiced. This study from Maria & Nurfaradilla (2021) also explains that a positive and practiced culture will have an impact on student performance.

Discussion and suggestions for improvement

Through the issues highlighted, it can be concluded that the contributor to the challenge of the Iban language refers to the various physical and mental aspects of individuals who want to teach and learn this ethnic subject and there is no denying that it is closely related to the surrounding factors. In my opinion, the issues and challenges mentioned above are still relevant until now even though the study was made in 2012. This is my rationale for choosing many studies from Magdeline anak Nor et. al (2012). All the results of his and his friends' studies still do not have a precise solution until now such as limited reference books and a lack of experienced teaching staff.

The application of moral values is still lacking due to the frequent change of teachers and the limited knowledge imparted to students. In addition, evaluation now focuses on the level of achievement even though there are no exams for secondary and primary schools. Teachers and students always strive to achieve the minimum level in this subject. Teachers, no matter old or new, are advised to review the theories in second language learning so that there is a clear guide to teaching and learning in the classroom.

Another rationale is to not give up on using traditional methods in teaching each other. Try to practice the theory to convey information more effectively to students and increase self-confidence in teaching this second language.

Finally, with the disclosure of information like this, it can help everyone involved apply what suits them. In this way, everyone will be more motivated to educate the nation's children

while students are aware and sensitive to the second language even if it is their mother tongue. Next, it can strengthen the Iban language on the world stage.

Conclusion

Much is covered in this independent study including, the history of the Iban people, the background of the Iban language, the development of the Iban language, the learning style of the Iban language, the Iban language curriculum, second language teaching theory, issues and challenges and discussions.

Overall, it's an interesting topic to hear again because there are issues that are considered outdated that still exist today even though life has moved in a modern direction. If it is not fixed it is expected to have a critical impact on the Iban language subject in the future.

In conclusion, the Iban language subject has the potential to be at the same level as other languages in the world. Provided that it is supported with various support so as not to fall far behind other subjects. If there is help and promotion from everyone, it is not impossible that this subject is popular among enthusiasts who like to add to their language.

The last thing is about the hope that the study of this subject will be done continuously so that more awareness about the issue will be uncovered and there will surely be a solution bit by bit to unravel the problem that never has an end. Apart from avoiding outdated issues becoming more critical, the study can also help future researchers to cover more specific topics and get exciting results.

Therefore, it is hoped that the issues and problems faced by teachers and students can be overcome by the responsible parties so that teachers and students are more enthusiastic and motivated in the process of teaching and learning the Iban language. The teachers feel confident in the delivery of their teaching while the students are more prepared and serious in their efforts to improve their level of mastery in Iban language skills. In addition, this study can open the ministry's eyes in highlighting effective ways to overcome non-option teaching staff for the future of the Iban language subject in the future. This is because educators are at the forefront of developing national education policies, especially those related to the Iban language.

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