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Article

For The Greater Good: Resolving Differences in Opinions on the Standard Indigenous Language in Sabah

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Abstract: Bahasa Kadazandusun or BKD is the sole indigenous language offered in schools in Sabah, initially under the Pupils' Own Language (POL) program based on the Education Act 1966. Different reactions towards BKD come from various concerned stakeholders i.e., ethnic societies, cultural bodies, and political organizations within the Kadazan and Dusun Orang Asal communities that make up almost 30% of the population of Sabah. Views on BKD range from critical and hardline positions to support and tolerance. Differing opinions can be read in the media due to the press statements by organizations or individuals reported in the news. However, one group whose opinions are rarely heard within the debates is the Orang Asal parents whose children are BKD learners at schools. This paper extracts findings from a larger study conducted to investigate the views and perspectives of stakeholders on the teaching and learning of the Kadazandusun language. In particular, this paper discusses relevant extracts from focus group discussions specifically with parents (n = 294) from five districts (Tambunan, Keningau, Kudat, Kota Marudu, and Tuaran). The study found that Orang Asal parents who are non-Kadazan or non-Dusun speakers are supportive of the BKD's position and role as the sole indigenous language option taught in the national education system while recognizing that they want their indigenous languages to be transmitted to their younger generation, the parents also strongly encourage for inclusion of other ethnic languages in the system, formally or informally. This study found that the acceptance and tolerance shown by the parents, though themselves not speakers of Kadazandusun, are consistent with the sense of community present within indigenous communities in Sabah. The support given by non-Kadazandusun speakers to the standard language points to existing social harmony in a multicultural and multilingual society in Sabah. This paper also discusses at length the history behind the establishment of BKD and language standardization ideology within indigenous communities' context.

Keywords: Indigenous language standardization, multilingualism, Kadazandusun, sense of community, social harmony

Introduction

The subject Kadazandusun (BKD or Bahasa Kadazandusun) was first taught in the national education system in 1997 to Year 4 students at 15 primary schools. At present, teachers for this subject obtain their teacher qualification through a bachelor's degree program from the Institute of Teacher Education (Kent Campus) and from *Universiti Perguruan Sultan Idris* (UPSI). BKD was officially offered as an elective subject for students in secondary schools in Sabah in Form 1 in 2006, Form 4 in 2010, and Form 5 in 2011. BKD is also an elective examination paper at both the national examination *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (SPM) and the then *Pentaksiran Tingkatan Tiga* (PT3) levels. At present, BKD is offered at 448 national schools in Sabah (n = 403 primary, 45 secondary) with a total of 41,615 students with about 1194 teachers (Sabah Education Department, 2021). To date, since 1997, Bahasa Kadazandusun or BKD has been the only indigenous language subject offered under the Pupils Own Language (POL) program in national schools in Sabah.

In the POL program, parents or pupils can request for their ethnic language to be taught as an elective subject in the school if more than 15 pupils show interest in learning that particular language. However, despite the seemingly easy requirement, there are actually various hurdles to the learning experience of an indigenous language within the program. Santhiram & Tan (2017: 33) described the POL's classes as "dysfunctional in most cases" in relation to Chinese and Tamil language classes. The Tamil's POL classes were "far from satisfactory, arising from the lack of well-drawn syllabuses, suitable textbooks, and trained teachers. … POL classes were conducted after school hours…" (Shoniah & Ramasamy, 2016: 95). The requirement for if more than 15 students request for the language also has some issues as David (2021) stated recently at her keynote presentation:

> *"This rarely happened however because minority communities with the same ethnic identity did not often number 15. … This notion of MT lessons as a subject with the provision of 15 students was not often feasible. In addition, languages taught outside the students' class timetable may be perceived as being unduly burdensome by both the students and parents. Students and parents need to be highly motivated. In fact, when Sabah and Sarawak joined Peninsular Malaya to become Malaysia the Education Act 1996 stated that indigenous languages would be made available if it is reasonable and practical. The reasonability and practicality of this possibility like the case of the POL in Malaya really depend on resources made available."*

The descriptions above point to these issues in the teaching of the ethnic language under the POL program: unsatisfactory; lack of well-drawn syllabuses, suitable textbooks, and trained teachers; classes conducted after school hours hence perceived as unduly burdensome and require high motivation from students and their parents; depends on if it is reasonable and practical and if there are available resources. The 'if there were available resources' might perhaps be the reason why there has yet to be another indigenous language from Sabah offered within the formal national curriculum ever since BKD was offered as a POL class in the national education curriculum in Sabah in 1997. It is with this background that the Sabah State Education Department has forged on with the BKD teaching and learning in schools despite the challenges. The purpose of this paper is solely to find out the views of parents (non-Kadazan speakers and non-Dusun speakers) on the teaching and learning of the Kadazandusun language in schools. The main research question for this paper is *How do parents view the teaching and learning of the Kadazandusun language in schools?* The ensuing discussion next turns to a review of literature on the relationship between language and ethnic identity, and the relationship of language to peace and harmony.

Literature Review

Indigenous language sustainability is one of SDG 2030's interests which prompted the United Nations to establish the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022-2032) in response to the rapid extinction of indigenous languages around the world. Experts estimate that 42 percent of the world's languages are endangered, with fewer than 1000 speakers. This alarming situation has prompted the United Nations to devote special attention to indigenous languages through the International Year of Indigenous Languages in 2019, followed by the International Decade of Indigenous Languages 2022–2032 as a show of solid support for indigenous communities' efforts to preserve their languages.

There are currently approximately 7,139 languages available in the world (Eberhard, Simons, & Fennig, 2021), with the majority of them in danger of extinction. The maintenance and promotion of indigenous languages is included in SDG4 (Inclusive and quality education and lifelong learning) because indigenous languages ensure the well-being and identity of indigenous communities. Indigenous languages must be preserved not just to protect the community's culture, customs, and history, but also to confront biodiversity loss and climate change (Reo et al., 2019).

Before going further, exactly how many indigenous languages are there in Sabah? Are all of them endangered? Does the language have any relationship to ethnic identity? This study was conducted in the state of Sabah, one part of Malaysian Borneo that includes the states of Sabah and Sarawak. The majority of indigenous languages in Malaysia are found in Sabah and Sarawak. Sabah's ethnic demography includes 33 ethnic groups, 50 languages, and roughly 80 dialects, according to official Sabah State Government data (Sabah State Government Official Website). The major ethnic groups are Kadazan, Lotud, Dusun, Bajau, Murut, Rungus, and Bisaya each having its own ethnic and cultural associations and these major ethnic groups already have their own dictionary. It is crucial for readers to understand the history behind the moniker Kadazandusun or Bahasa Kadazandusun (BKD) i.e. the standard Indigenous language. With so many languages and dialects, how did 'Kadazandusun' become the standard language? It began on November 4 -5, 1989 at the 5th Kadazan Cultural Association's Delegates when,

> *The unified term "Kadazandusun" was thus unanimously adopted as the best alternative generic identity as well as the most appropriate approach to resolve the "Kadazan" or "Dusun" identity crisis.*
>
> *(www.kdca.org.my)*

At the time of the conference, political awakening had already reached the Kadazans and Dusuns with different political parties set up to represent each ethnic community. Cohesion and harmonious relationship was frayed with the then United Sabah Dusun Association (USDA) demanded for equal recognition to organize the state-level *Kaamatan* or they would organize a rival harvest festival instead (Reid, 1997: 134). In addition, to the generic identity, USDA strongly stated that "…we will not accept any form of pressure to change our ethnic name" (ibid.). This background state the importance of the indigenous language to the ethnic community. Incidentally, the name of the ethnic community is also the name of its language, and both are strong markers of identity. Prior to the 1989 conference, in August of the same year, the Kadazan Cultural Association (KCA) announced its name as the Kadazan Dusun Cultural Association (KDCA) to drive home the point that Kadazans and Dusuns are the same people irrespective of the ethnic name (ibid). The move proved successful to placate USDA and eventually the unified term *Kadazandusun* was agreed to at the 1989 conference. The desire to unite the 40 dialectical groups might be the reason the elders at the conference

agreed to the name Kadazandusun and, at the time, the more trying conceptual matters, was not the foremost item for deliberation (Tangit, 2005: 21).

The political unity appeared to bear fruit when in 1995, KDCA published its *Kadazan Dusun Malay English* dictionary. The process of the name of Bahasa Kadazandusun reached its peak with Kadazandusun Language Resolution (1995) that stated Kadazandusun is the official name for the standard indigenous language and Bunduliwan as the official dialect for that standard language (www.kdca.org.my). With the effect of the generic identity, *Kadazandusun*, the KDCA Constitution in Article 6 (1) therefore states that *Kadazandusun* is the "indigenous peoples of Sabah comprising the following dialectical ethnic groups":

Bisaya	Kuijau	Murut	Sungei
Bonggi	Lingkabau	Nabai	Tatana
Bundu	Liwan	Paitan	Tangara
Dumpas	Lobu	Pingas	Tidong
Gana	Lotud	Rumanau	Tindal
Garo	Lundayo	Rungus	Tobilung
Ida'an	Makiang	Sinobu	Tolinting
Kadayan	Malapi	Sinorupu	Tombonuo
Kimaragang	Mangkaak	Sonsogon	Tuhawon
Kolobuon	Minokok	Sukang	Tutung

and the article further added an asterisk to indicate that a Kadazandusun is also "persons whose mother tongue is any of the above dialect and who habitually practices and expresses the traditions, custom and other cultural manifestations of the same." The various ethnic groups appeared to be united under one generic identity as per the 1989 conference result. Reid however termed the arrangement and compromise as 'awkward' and questioned whether it was an effort that was somewhat too late to save the indigenous languages of Sabah (1997: 135) leaving the issues of identity in Sabah still without any closure. The compromise back in 1989, we argue, remain fragile as this issue continue to come up now and again with the latest in 2018. The continued queries towards BKD by its critics is because "Language is then likely to be the symbol of ethnic identity 'par excellence' because language is more than symbolic of ethnic identity; language becomes the prime ethnic identity feature or practice in and of itself" (Fishman, 1977 cited by Garcia, 2012: 81).

Sansalu stated that despite the different dialects, some similarities still exist between the community because their languages are subsumed under the three language families of Dusunic, Murutic, and Paitanic languages (2014: 447). According to Sansalu, similarities were found mainly in the pronunciation and meaning of numbers; and the most striking parallels were names of body parts, names of plants, and birds to these dialects originating from the same lineage or were derived from Proto-Austronesia (ibid). Despite the similarities, however, there are differences between Murut spoken in Tenom and Rungus spoken in Kudat, between Rungus in Kudat and Tatana in Beaufort, and between Tangara in Penampang to Liwan, Tagahas, Tindal and Tidong dialects. Nonetheless, despite the differences, Sansalu maintained that the speakers of these language families can still manage to understand each other in their communication and that these differences resulted in the difficulties in selecting a standard for these language families (p. 540). If the indigenous communities could understand each other then what caused the difficulties to select a standard indigenous language? We argue that the possible cause lies in tribal rivalries in particular with the differences in education status and

locales (interior vs. township/urban) then. In 1985, when the Kadazan-led party won the state election, there were fears that "the urban literati of the coast had hijacked "Kadazan" identity for their own purposes" (ibid). Data from the research will show whether this is still the case.

At this stage we can state that the indigenous communities are multilingual communities. The ability to understand different languages and dialects other than one's own has been a facet of indigenous peoples' communication practices. However, Indigenous peoples and their language traditions have been put under tremendous strain as a result of colonization. They have had to learn the language(s) of the outsiders at the expense of their ancestral language and multilingual practices that encourage the use of both or all languages. The original linguistic setting in Sabah amongst the indigenous peoples align with the definition on the study of multilingualism where individuals and societies use many languages to varied degrees of proficiency, including regional languages, minority languages, migratory languages, and language variants such as dialects (Franceschini, 2009: 29). In fact, this goes for people in Borneo as a general rule, it is very common to know another language apart from the one spoken at home. Jones (2007: 131) stated that "A number of Borneans are literate in more than one language, and probably most people *speak* at least one tongue in addition to their own". Hence, it is understandable that acceptance of a standard is slow to come to the when multilingualism is common practice. Costa et al. (2018: 1-2) explained the not so embracing attitude towards standardisation as,

> *"…standardisation is inherently a limitation of diversity (Milroy and Milroy 1999) and a way to harness and act upon linguistic, that is to say, social differences. Promoting language standards is thus both a way for validating groups and for limiting group-internal diversity. Considering that diversity is often the very raison d'etre for minority language movements based on the claims that all ways of communicating are equally legitimate, and that language diversity needs to be protected, this trade-off is at best contentious and at worst a Faustian bargain. Language advocates, and in some cases state or regional authorities, often view standards as emancipatory and empowering, a way to promote education and other forms of civic communication through mother tongues and ensure better chances of equal achievement for minority groups. Yet, such processes require selecting particular forms over others; they generate and legitimise certain varieties of writing or speaking, as well as the structures and institutions that sustain their diffusion. This potentially establishes linguistic standards that speakers themselves cannot meet, together with new hierarchies that give advantage to some speakers over others….. Paradoxically, standards for minority languages may come to be perceived by social actors as lacking both the authenticity or the capacity to index locality often ascribed to minority languages*"
>
> (Woolard 2008)".

Breaking down the lengthy, yet necessary, quote above, indeed opinions opposed to BKD raised doubts about its authenticity stating that BKD is a mixture of Bundu and Liwan. Critics claimed that this mixture made it even more difficult for learners to master the subject and teachers had problems teaching the subject[1].

Actions perceived to be threats to the language of the community, an element of ethnic identity, would inevitably be viewed negatively or at least warily by the language community. An example of a strong reaction by the language speaker community was the *Perarakan Keranda 152*, a protest by Malay language activists on 3 March 1967 where a coffin was carried by the protesters to symbolise the death of Article 152 in the

[1] *Educationist disputes Tangau's statement on Bundu-Liwan*. Borneo Post, 29 Sept 2018.

Malaysian Constitution. Article 152 states that the language of instruction for education is Malay however the Language Bill 1967 at the time retained English as the medium of instruction for schools as well as the judiciary. An even stronger reaction by speaker communities was in 1952 in East Bengal (now Bangladesh) after the partition of British India in 1947. Despite Bangla being the more widely spoken language in East Bengal, the government instituted Urdu as the sole national language in 1947. The move resulted in mass discontent which the government attempted to stop by banning public meetings. The Bengali-speaking majority community of East Pakistan was discriminated against using Urdu exclusively in education and communication. East Pakistan's Bengali majority community viewed this forced imposition of Urdu as a negation of their linguistic identity, which equated to discrimination against the Bengali minority (Deb, 2021: 62). The Bengali Language Movement led the protest which reached its height on 21 February 1952 where police opened fire and killed four university student protesters. The Bengali Language Movement gave rise to Bengali national identity in East Bengal (later East Pakistan) and started nationalist movements[2] in Bengal, including the 6-Point Movement and most notably the Bengali Language Implementation Act, 1987.

With the examples provided in this discussion, we can surmise that uniting different groups using a language perceived or meant to solidify relationships or to strengthen nationalistic sentiments, or to create unity is by no means easy nor simple. The deaths of the Bangla speakers who refused to acknowledge the minority Urdu as their national language in a majority Bangla-speaking then East Pakistan is a tragedy for actors and agencies involved in policy making and planning. The moral of what happened is that when it comes to language, discussions need to be approached from a position of honor and security because "language symbolizes the people, it represents them, it speaks volumes for them" (Fishman, 1996: 92). We posit that the back-and-forth name change for the national language of Malaysia reflects exactly what Fishman was trying to impart. Malay language in Malaysia has reverted between Bahasa Melayu and Bahasa Malaysia (currently it is known as Bahasa Melayu) unlike Bahasa Indonesia which has stood the test of time for centuries ever since Indonesia's independence in 1945. In the recent debate of Malaysia intention to make Malay the second language of ASEAN, Indonesia respectfully declined to support the proposal based on the fact that in Indonesia, Malay is known as a *bahasa daerah* whereas their national language is Bahasa Indonesia. Prof. Kamaruddin M. Said of Majlis Profesor Negara, Malaysia stated that Indonesia's reluctance to provide their support to the proposal is understandable given that the term *Bahasa Melayu* to Indonesians is akin to elevating a *bahasa daerah* on top of the nation's revered national language, Bahasa Indonesia. In Malaysia meanwhile, the names Bahasa Melayu appear to be more popular compared to Bahasa Malaysia. Indeed, to date, the name remains as Bahasa Melayu instead of Bahasa Malaysia.

With this background, we ask why the resistance towards the standard indigenous language Bahasa Kadazandusun? Should not indigenous communities be elated that a language of theirs is in the national education system? Let us turn to the relationship between language and ethnicity to better frame our answer to these questions. Language can be an important or even an essential part of belonging to an ethnic group, according to Trudgill (2000:44-45) and in many parts of the world, language is a defining characteristic of

[2] In 1956, Bengali was officially recognized as the second official language in Pakistan and, upon independence, the national language of Bangladesh. To commemorate their language martyrs, Bangladesh proposed to the UN the International Mother Language Day and it was approved by UNESCO at its general conference in 1999. Through the International Mother Language Day, UNESCO aims to raise awareness about the importance of linguistic, cultural, and multilingual diversity. The day has been observed worldwide since the year 2000.

ethnic identity because people primarily identify themselves based on their mother tongue. In essence, language plays a crucial role in ethnic groups' construction of separateness and identity. The discussion, therefore, points to the idea that each ethnic community looks highly upon their language irrespective of whether outsiders view their language as a dialect or as a minority language. It bears to reason therefore that ethnic communities again place value and respect to the elements that mark the identity of an ethnic group i.e. languages being one of them. This is multilingualism at its most basic. The concept of multilingualism is applauded even at the level of the United Nations. The United Nations General Assembly through Resolution 56/262 (2002) recognizes two things: a) *that the United Nations pursues multilingualism as a means of promoting, protecting and preserving diversity of languages and cultures globally*, and b) *that genuine multilingualism promotes unity in diversity and international understanding.* It can be argued that diversity and inclusivity of all languages and cultures is crucial to maintain peace and harmony at the global level what more at the national and local level? This is perhaps the biggest challenge to states and nations which has one form or another of language standardisation in their language policy.

One of these challenges is the perception by some within the indigenous Kadazan community that the language, BKD is a combination of languages, and therefore is not authentic, and this language is an imposition on the ethnic communities' young generation to learn a language (Kadazandusun) that is not any of the ethnic communities' but based on the Bundu and Liwan dialects with a name joined together. This claim has been a catalyst for debate and polemic ever since the standardization of the Kadazan and Dusun dialects in 1995. Critics claim that Bahasa Kadazandusun or BKD is "linguistically poor and experiencing dilution as a result of language assimilation and language accommodation. On top of that many unwritten Kadazandusun lexicon was lost in addition to the new generation who are not well-acquainted with the language" (Podtung, 2015). This debate on the standard Kadazandusun has been around off and on. Thirty years earlier in 1988, at the first announcement on the teaching of Iban and "Kadazan" in Malaysian schools, the United Sabah Dusun Association (USDA) had protested to the Kadazan Cultural Association and declared that "The Dusuns recognize and accept all ethnic names, including the Kadazan, hence we demand the full measure of respect and recognition due to us, and we will not accept any form of pressure to change our ethnic name" (Reid, 1997: 134). However, more recently at a forum organized by the Borneo Institute for Indigenous Studies at UMS, USDA no longer espouses such fiery declaration and appear to be more supportive of the standard indigenous language.

In 2018, statements from different individuals and organizations in relation to the issue of the minority language standardization (see Bating, 2018) were all over the media. Amongst the statements headlined were *Bahasa Bundu Liwan langgar Akta Pendidikan* [lit. 'Bundu Liwan goes against Education Act'] (Daily Express, 29 & 30 September 2018), *Bunduliwan it is* (Sabah News Today, 24 September 2018), *Dialek Bunduliwan sebagai asas dalam pengajaran dan pembelajaran bahasa Kadazandusun tepat: Pakar* [lit. 'Bunduliwan dialect is apt as foundation for teaching and learning of Kadazandusun'] (Sabah News Today, 15 October 2018), and *Bundu-Liwan dialect official Kadazandusun language in school* (Borneo Post, 24 September 2018). The concern voiced by the Kadazan Society of Sabah (KSS) is "Kadazan children will have the right to choose their own "Mother Tongue" language in schools and then would it be right to call it their "Mother Tongue" language if they are allowed to learn it" (Moinin, Borneo Today, 27 May 2019). In his piece in the newspaper, elder Aloysius Moinin lamented that the community's request to learn Kadazan (instead of Kadazandusun) was seen as creating a polemic and were instead advised to move forward.

Interestingly, one group whose opinions were rarely heard within this debate were the voices of the Orang Asal parents, in particular parents who are non-Kadazan or Dusun speakers. They speak other languages such as Rungus, Murut, or Dusun Lotud. Within the media reports, there were no attempts made by either the media or ethnic organizations to enquire the views of the parents – whose children were the ones learning BKD in schools. Therefore, given that the media already has perspectives from the other stakeholders, this paper attempts to present the perspectives of the heretofore unheard-of group of stakeholders: the Orang Asal parents, specifically those who are not native speakers of Kadazan or Dusun. There is extensive research suggesting that parents' involvement and engagement with their children's academic matters results in positive learning outcomes. Goodall & Montgomery (2014:400) describes the difference between 'parental involvement' and 'parental engagement with the latter as involving "a greater commitment, a greater ownership of action, than will parental involvement with schools." Other scholars supporting the positive traits of parental engagement are Harris et al. (2008), Goodall (2017), Durisic & Bunijevac (2017), and specifically for indigenous language learning Hornberger (2008), McIvor & Parker (2016), Hinton & Hale (2001), Fishman (1990, 1991, 2001), Spolsky (2004, 2012, 2019), and Romaine (2000, 2007). In elaborating the importance of the language nest approach to indigenous language revitalization, McIvor & Parker (2016) stated that "It is parents' belief in language revitalization and willingness to commit to language learning in their family that makes language nests successful. There is a saying, "It takes a family to save a language" (p. 29).

Methodology

We examine language and ethnic identity from an applied linguistics perspective in this study. In the words of Brumfit (1995: 27), applied linguistics is "the study of linguistic problems in real-world contexts". This study utilised a qualitative methodology and we conducted the focus group discussions at Tambunan, Keningau, Kudat, Kota Marudu, and Tuaran with a total of 10 villages (two in each district) as fieldwork locations. However, for this paper, we will use as data the extracts from FGDs conducted at non-Kadazan, non-Dusun majority areas i.e. Kudat (Rungus language), Kota Marudu (Kimaragang language) and Tuaran (Lotud language) to find out the responses of the non-speakers towards the standard and their acceptance and/or opinions about the standard. The instruments for the data collection were structured questions for the focus group discussion with the parents group. Some of the parents who attended the FGD sessions also played different roles within the community i.e. as community leaders, village heads, the head or members of the Village Development and Security Committee, teachers, or small business owners. Data obtained from the focus group discussions were obtained by probing the respondents using structured interview questions. One criticism of the focus group discussion is the tendency for only the most talkative of the respondents who will be giving input. Probing techniques were used to overcome this issue. The researchers used probing techniques to shift turns among respondents, so everyone gets a turn to give their input. The researchers made use of probes in as natural a style and voice as possible with the "Wh-"question even if the actual question require detail-oriented responses. The benefit of this technique and method is complete descriptions and explanations of the respondents' experiences and the natural atmosphere encouraged respondents to keep talking and elaborating (Riazi, 2016: 249).

As explained earlier, this paper reports only part of a larger research and thus the findings presented here are only relevant to this particular research question: *How do parents view the teaching and learning of the Kadazandusun language in schools?* The findings presented reflect the voices of the Orang Asal parents as

found from responses to particular themes in the questionnaire and from unstructured questions in the focus group discussion.

Before going further, below are some demographic information that might be relevant for this discussion. We begin with Table 1.0 shows the demography of the research participants:

Table 1. Demography

No	Item		Frequency
1	Dialect	Pinokok	1
		Lobu	1
		Minokok	1
		Murut	2
		Kuruyou	3
		Bundu	6
		Kadazan	7
		Kimaragang	25
		Lotud	25
		Liwan	38
		Rungus	40
		Tindal	70
		Dusun	75
		Total	294
2	Gender	Male	131
		Female	163
		Total	294
3	Age	30 years old and below	78
		30 years old and above	216
		Total	294
4	Education	Bachelor's degree and higher	22
		Certificate	35
		Upper Secondary (SPM/STPM)	154
		Lower Secondary (PMR/SRP)	44
		None	39
		Total	294

Based on Table 1.0 above, it is apparent that the majority of respondents have the following classification that is 'a woman from the Dusun ethnicity, speaks one or any of the Dusun dialect, aged 30 and above, and has an upper secondary school education level". Let us proceed to the items in the questionnaire that deals

with the theme 'Parents' views on the Teaching and Learning of Bahasa Kadazandusun in schools.' We can also see that, if going by dialect, speakers of Bundu, Liwan, and those who stated their dialect using the generic name Dusun numbered only 40.5% (n=119). This means that 59.5%, the majority of the respondents, were speakers of other indigenous dialects. This information provides more depth to the respondents' views in relation to the teaching and learning of the standard indigenous language in the national curriculum. The extracts of which are shown on Table 2.0 below:

Table 2. Extracts from FGD with parents who are speakers of languages other than Kadazan and Dusun

No.	*Extracts*	Location
1.	*Mdm. M: … if my child has homework for BKD, I can't teach him because I don't know BKD. Ah that's one of those things that's like there's a problem. If it's possible, if it's like Rungus, I'd be able to teach him as it's easier. It does seem to be a problem. Well, that's my opinion.* *…The BKD teacher here is a Rungus ethnic. I'm not all that sure what he's teaching is correct because he himself is Rungus and not Kadazandusun.*	Kudat
2.	*Mr. A: We in Sabah think it's too late to restore our own language. It's not just Rungus. Kimaragang younger generation aren't very good at speaking Kimaragang, even Sungai people aren't very good at their language. Even Rungus people don't know how to speak Rungus already. If they do, it's all over the place. Maybe if we're already too late, the languages are already extinct.*	Kudat
3.	*Mr. B:* ***If it's for me, I need to learn Dusun with Kadazan****, but that's me. Similarly, the Dusun and Kadazan people need to learn Rungus, and for Rungus people to learn Kadazan or Dusun.*	Kudat
4.	*Mr. A: I hope that in the years to come that educated people who are fluent in Rungus will use the opportunity to make textbooks for primary school, that's my hope.* *Maybe one day Rungus, Kimaragang, Tombonuo will have their own textbooks.* ***If BKD learning goes on as usual, it will make it easier for us to include our languages there. Who knows if BKD will be cut off and we're left with no indigenous language in the schools, so let it go on. Learn BKD at school, and at home teach your child your own language.*** *If you can't, what to do, we won't blame them.*	Kudat

5.	*Dr. H: … So, what about if the subject name stays as BKD but in one of its syllabus include the learning of Rungus?* *Mdm A: So much better.* *Mdm B: Especially if the one teaching Rungus is a Rungus him/herself.* *Mr. B: It's much better like that, it makes things easier. If we said we don't want BKD because we are Rungus, fine, we use BKD but at the same time we have learning of Rungus, there's a Rungus part. Because, let's face it, those who are teaching BKD here are Rungus themselves, because there's no Dusun here in this village.*	Kudat
6.	*Mdm A: Well, if I'm the one who's asked, I'd want my language to be a national language,* ***but we have to be realistic****.*	Kudat
7.	*Mdm A:* ***Yes, we continue with BKD but with improvement*** *by separating Kadazan and Dusun teaching. Because sometimes the children get confused which one is their native language. Yes, it is Kadazandusun that the education department gave to us from the beginning, even my son is one of the BKD teachers.* *Even he agrees if Kadazandusun is separated. Like in Kota Marudu, give us Dusun, because they don't understand Kadazan. Like myself, I only two, three words of Kadazan. (Mdm A, Kota Marudu)*	Kota Marudu
8.	*Prof. A: What about if there are two indigenous languages in the education system to learn? What will happen? What do you all think?* *Mdm. A:* ***Teach BKD in schools that are in towns or cities****. For schools in the rural and interior, like here in Pitas, teach the children Kimaragang and Dusun, both.* *Prof. A: So, meaning BKD should be continued, yes?* *Mdm. A:* ***Yes, it's necessary****.* *Prof. A: … so if we introduce the Rungus subject, what will happen to BKD? Can we continue to teach it in schools, or should we just teach Kimaragang?* *Mdm. A: Yes, that's what I meant.* ***In my opinion, BKD can be at schools while Kimaragang can be taught in certain areas only****.* *Mr. A: The Prof. meant, BKD stays in schools and at the same time there's an improvement in that Kimaragang is taught in schools as an option. So, either Kimaragang stays in school and BKD is eliminated.* *All respondents****: No, don't eliminate it****.* *Mr. A: So, now, BKD is continued and add one more language, Kimaragang. One of the reasons is that this here is Kimaragang language area****. The children need to learn BKD too and at the same time Kimaragang is their native language.*** *They cannot leave it behind. If they learn BKD,*	Kota Marudu

	they cannot understand Kimaragang. They cannot communicate with their family in Kimaragang.	
9.	*Prof. A: So, what do you think about BKD in schools?* *Mr. A:* ***Rather than nothing, it is good that there is BKD in schools****. If it is continued to be taught to the children, there is no problem. Then the parents need to teach Kimaragang to their children at home on their own. This is my opinion. The parents' responsibility.*	Kota Marudu
10.	*Mr. B: On whether it is combined or separated…OK, as an activist for the Dusun language, we strive for Dusun. But given what has been agreed by USDA and KDCA in 1996 in which the language to be used in schools is BKD. So BKD is based on Bunduliwan. Nevertheless, here we are Lotud.* ***However, we support Bunduliwan as the medium of instruction*** *because in Keningau there is also Liwan, in Tambunan, Ranau, Kota Marudu, Tamparuli … everywhere because it is a minority…* ***For the good of everyone so that there is no quarrel, it is alright if it is combined****… it is for the best.*	Tuaran
11.	*Mr. W:* ***I agree with the current teaching and learning but improvements should be taken into consideration.*** *Meaning of improvement is what is in the Constitution is that Dusun is included in our Malaysian laws. Therefore, Kadazandusun is in essence Dusun is the majority, so we agree that Dusun is the language in schools spearheaded by Dusun Liwan and supported by all Dusun ethnics.* ***However, if these two dialects move together in the education of our children and future generations, it is in my opinion not wrong either****.*	Tuaran
12.	*Dr. R: So, everyone here is Lotud, right. What happens to Suang Lotud language if BKD is the language that is taught at schools?* *Mr. B: OK, we always discuss this issue as well. What happens to our Lotud if BKD or Bunduliwan is taught in schools? Aren't we afraid our language will drown? For information, yes there are questions such as this, but we think further into the future, because if we want Lotud to be in schools,* ***maybe we can open our own specific pre-school where they can learn Suang Lotud.***	Tuaran
13.	*Mr. M: In my opinion, about the future of Dusun Lotud, in my capacity as elders and head of tradition and local customs, Dusun Lotud will not be extinct. Because it will go on and be improved from time to time.* ***We agree that Kadazandusun be in schools, but yes other Dusuns will question it. Theirs will be in as well, so now each ethnic community nurture and preserve their own culture and identity so it will not be extinct****. Therefore, our insurance that Dusun Lotud will not be extinct is our ethnic leaders will from time to time improve their indigenous language. In that way, it will not be questionable.*	Tuaran

The above is but a small portion of the whole FGD data from the one and a half-year worth of fieldwork. To discuss everything will take more than the pages allowed for this article hence we selected the most relevant for the discussion of the research question.

Discussion

Looking at the data in Table 2.0, we can see that parents show a positive attitude to language diversity. As mentioned earlier, the extracts selected for this paper were specifically from areas where the main indigenous languages spoken were not Kadazan nor Dusun i.e. Rungus language in Kudat, Kimaragang language in Kota Marudu, and Suang Lotud language in Tuaran. From the items above, we can immediately see two attitudes: 1) the speakers of Rungus, Kimaragang, and Suang Lotud in this study were aware that BKD is the selected variety over theirs; 2) the speakers of Rungus, Kimaragang, and Suang Lotud were aware that the selection of one over many (standardisation) has affected the younger generation's grasp of their individual languages and they are not ignoring this issue; 3) the speakers of Rungus, Kimaragang, and Suang Lotud in this study believe that to counter the issue in no.3, parents and their own indigenous community play, and should be playing, a more important role to ensure there is intergenerational transmission within the speaker communities' families.; and 4) the respondents, in general, agree that a representative language in the system is better than nothing at all. As we have elaborated earlier in the review of literature, standardisation of a language, especially when it involves indigenous peoples who value their ethnic identity and henceforth the identity markers such as their indigenous language, it is not an activity that could be completed with one conference nor with announcements of resolutions. This is because, the communities whose languages the varieties not chosen to be highlighted as the standard have to bear with two truths: 1) their children will be learning at school, not their own mother tongues but another one; 2) they have to find other ways to impart their mother tongues to their children for as long as there is no inclusion of their languages in the system. Lane (2004: 264) expressed the situation perfectly here,

> *"Developing a standard for a minority language is not a neutral process; this has consequences for the status of the language and how the language users relate to the new standard. A potential inherent problem with standardisation is whether the language users themselves will accept and identify with the standard chosen. When standardising minority languages, one risks establishing a standard that the users do not identify with, and thus, standardisation which was supposed to empower minority language speakers may create a new form of stigma for those who feel that they cannot live up to the new codified standard"*
>
> (Gal 2006; Lane 2011)

In this study of the speakers are not speakers of the standard dialect Bunduliwan, parents still responded positively to the presence of BKD in the national curriculum. The extracts in bold i.e. Items 4, 9, and 10 refer to BKD as a representative of the many indigenous languages that speak "at least there is one indigenous language in the national education system". The indigenous communities are realistic (Item 6) and agree to BKD (in bold in all of the extracts) yet at the same time we argue that they are pragmatic and proactive in their approaches to stem the tide of language extinction as in "learn BKD at school, teach your own language at home" (Item 4), "Teach BKD in city schools but teach the local dialect in the rural areas" (Item 8). Based on just these several extracts, we can provide an intelligent guess at as Lane puts it, "how the language users relate to the new standard. A potential inherent problem with standardisation is whether the language users

themselves will accept and identify with the standard chosen." in that the critics are somewhat alone in how they relate quite aggressively towards BKD, as opposed to the way these respondents reacted, more diplomatic in their negotiation to calling for an improvement to BKD (bold Items 7, 11) while saying it is a possibility to establish their own pre-school for their own indigenous language (Item 12) and voicing their hopes that one day in the future there will be textbooks for primary level learners in their indigenous language (Item 4).

Reading the extracts, we get a sense of the general support and acknowledgment of the issue if the matter becomes an either-or (*either teach me my indigenous language* or *don't teach any at all*) and despite the presence of BKD is at the expense of their own indigenous languages, the preference is for no quarrel and for the good of everyone. This positive show of support to BKD is an important indicator to language policy makers in that it signals indigenous parents' (in particular speakers of non-Bunduliwan dialect) appreciation towards government policies that will take into consideration their roots and identities, as they have bent over backward – so to speak - in making way for the standardized variant. The sense of *misompuru* (Dusun, 'united') even if their own indigenous languages' existence is at stake shows the consideration and understanding the indigenous Kadazan and Dusun communities are towards their fellow indigenes.

As researchers, we see the positive response as an unsaid call for understanding and help from the indigenous parents who have complied all this while whilst their own dialects are up for the loss and are disappearing. Despite enjoying the acceptance of the indigenous parents, policymakers should more proactively find a more win-win situation that would reflect an increase in fluency and usage of the standard indigenous language while at the same time ensuring the home dialect of non-standard speakers keep on being maintained and used as well within their community. How might this be achieved? We propose a re-interpretation of what is standard within the multilingual indigenous communities of Sabah. The positive attitude to the indigenous variety selected as standard is similar in many other minority / indigenous languages. According to Costa et al, "minoritized language groups are often familiar with multilingualism and view diversity positively as an asset" (2017:12), so much so that scholars suggest there could be a re-interpretation of what is 'standard language' for indigenous language learning settings i.e."a future in which a diversity of voices rather than a monolithic norm is the way in which we imagine the standard language' (Deumert & Mabandla, 2017: 13). A reinterpretation of what is a 'standard indigenous language' can avoid the off and on polemic between whose dialect variety should be "the" standard indigenous language and instead "rather than being a conflict which is resolved in order to be erased, the diversity within minority speech communities appears to be a tenacious and perhaps essential feature" (Costa et al, 2017: 13). This re-interpretation we feel is possible because of the difference between the efforts to standardize indigenous and national languages. There are three differences as argued by Costa et. al (ibid.). The first difference is "the low, yet potentially fluctuating social status of minoritized communities" which can change based on support by institutional bodies or community leaders in the political sphere; second, minority (an in this case, indigenous) languages have standardization stages which are more "contemporary, documented, accessible and visible" as opposed to the more natural processes which add stability to the standardization of national languages; and third, the relationships between the indigenous languages which is different in context to the idea of state/national languages where users are expected to be, or become, monolingual. Indigenous language speakers are very much accepting of pluralism and multilingualism.

Recommendations

A re-interpretation of what is standard for the indigenous language policy in Sabah, that suit the local setting and context, would enable more positive reactions to the indigenous parents' suggestion for improvement in current practices. The parents suggest 1 – for the authorities to allow and help them (in terms of funding i.e., to pay stable salaries of the indigenous language teachers) to also teach their local indigenous dialect as well to their children without doing away with BKD. BKD can stay in schools, but their home language should be their own dialect transferred to their children; 2 – for an increase of vocabulary of other indigenous dialects in the BKD textbooks; and 3 – for schools offering BKD to provide glossaries that contain other indigenous varieties of words used in the textbooks. Suggestions 1 and 2 will be useful to children (and their parents) who do not speak the Bunduliwan dialect. The parents stated that the dictionaries can help them assist their children to do homework and understand the BKD materials as they often find they also do not know many of the words in the textbooks as in they are unfamiliar with the variety used in the textbook.

Conclusion

In one focus group discussion, an elder in Kg. X, Keningau – a Dusun heartland – lamented that the youths in his village who can speak in Dusun number less than 5 percent and most can understand but cannot speak the language. The elder said, "*oruol dot ginawo*" (my heart hurts) and he emphasized the responsibility of parents, *'haro responsibility dot molohing'.* The elder represents the voice of Orang Asal parents who are concerned about the future of the Indigenous generation. The voice of Orang Asal parents should be foremost taken into consideration in particular when creating policies that would impact their children's identity and the future of their language. Taking the voices of Orang Asal parents into serious consideration when planning the teaching and learning of the standard indigenous language will impart the message that the policymakers are interested to acquire the parental 'buy-in' into the BKD program.

To conclude, the situation with the T&L of BKD is not a straightforward matter and rarely is neutral as Lane (2004) stated. There are many layers that need to be worked on in awareness that one is dealing with the sensitivities of indigenous parents. It is possible that strategies/policies that work in one culture/community would be different from what works in another. This means that continuous engagement and collaboration with Orang Asal parents and the communities where the T& L is taking place will be a welcome change indeed for a more robust and lasting indigenous language acquisition amongst the young indigenous generation. Nonetheless, the discussion in this paper has managed to show that despite challenges that involve the teaching and learning of BKD, it is heartening that a sense of community and social harmony exists amongst the indigenous communities, even amongst non-Kadazan and non-Dusun speakers. The implication of this acceptance and tolerance towards BKD is the support towards the standard indigenous language will ensure BKD stays within the national education system; but at the same time, the policymakers should also strive to engage and improve where necessary[3].

[3] An enlightening outcome of the research has been all along the support and interest of the Ministry of Education, in particular its Ethnic Language Unit, which has been proactive in the issue of teaching and learning of indigenous languages. Presently, a committee has been formed to look at the way forward for the BKD curriculum.

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