

# MALAY PARENTS' PERSPECTIVE ON ADMISSION OF THEIR CHILDREN TO CHINESE PRIMARY SCHOOL IN KELANTAN, MALAYSIA

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## ABSTRACT

According to the statistical resources from the Education Ministry of Malaysia, the enrolment of non-Chinese in Chinese primary schools in Malaysia had been increasing gradually from year 1989 to 1999. The percentage of those non-Chinese students in Chinese primary schools has grown from 3.0% to 10.7% nationwide. In year 2000, the figure of non-Chinese students was estimated to be over 60,000 in which the Malays are believed to be the largest ethnic group in those Chinese schools. In this study, the researcher focused mainly on the Malay students who were sent by their parents to Chinese primary schools in Kelantan. The study was performed using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Firstly, the enrolment data of Malay students from year 2000 to 2009 in all Chinese primary schools in Kelantan were collected to find out the Malay students' enrolment trend in Chinese schools. Later, a total of 300 Malay parents from fourteen Chinese primary schools in Kelantan were chosen as respondents to participate in the questionnaire study. This was to explore the factors that influenced them in sending their children to Chinese primary schools, and also the overall academic and social outcomes. The Malay parents' social-demographic background (occupation type, monthly household income and education level) had also been analyzed to better understand which group formed the majority to send their children to Chinese schools. Besides, semi-structured interviews were carried out among the selected schools' headmasters and 10 Malay parents who sent their children to Chinese schools, in order to obtain more in-depth opinions and answers. The findings indicated that there is a trend of Malay parents to send their children to Chinese primary schools. Hence, the figure in 2009 was 54.5%. Also, the results indicated that 54.3% of the respondents of this study earned less than RM1000 monthly as their household income. Thirdly, "the perspective of my child's future" was found to be the most influential factor that for Malay parents in Kelantan to send their children to Chinese primary schools.

**Keywords:** Malay parents, Malay students, Admission to Chinese primary schools in Malaysia.

## **INTRODUCTION:**

According to the statistical resources from the Education Ministry of Malaysia, the enrolment of non-Chinese in Chinese primary schools in Malaysia from year 1989 to 1999 had been increasing gradually. The percentage of these non-Chinese students in Chinese primary schools throughout the country has grown from 3.0% to 10.7%. In year 2000, there were 60,000 non-Chinese students, the majority of them were Malays who were studying in Chinese primary schools and the trend appears to be on the upward cycle (Lee 2007, p.140). How about the Malay students in the state of Kelantan who enrolled in Chinese primary schools? According to a 2008 census in Kelantan, Malaysia, the population of Kelantan consisted of 94.48% Malays, 3.42% Chinese, 0.26% Indians, 0.84% other Bumiputeras and others 1%. There are 404 National-Type schools in Kelantan, and also plenty of religious schools in this Islamic state that is also known as “*Negeri Serambi Mekah*” (Mekah’s corridor state), But there are only 14 Chinese medium schools in Kelantan. The Malaysian government has built many well-equipped National-type Malay language medium schools, given continuous support to these schools and highly promoted the people to enroll in National-type schools, so these National-type Malay language medium schools should be the Malay people’s first choice for their children. However, the number of Malay students who were enrolled in 11 Chinese primary schools in the state has already exceeded 10%. What causes them to send their children to Chinese medium language primary schools? Or what are the contributing factors that make these Malay parents to enroll their children in Chinese primary schools?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW:**

A form of Chinese education has existed in Malaya since 1919. Wu Fu College was the first Chinese school in Malaysia established in 1819 (Sia, 2005). Tay (1982) had studied the historical development of education in the Perak state. In year 1907, the Chinese in “Gunong Hijau” founded a Chinese private school. The medium of instruction of the school that time was not Mandarin, but there were some dialects from the Mandarin language such as Cantonese, Hokkien and Teow Chew. The uniqueness of Chinese primary schools is thus focus on learning by recitation, repetition and practice as a whole (Sia, 2005). The Chinese education system in Malaysia had become more independent in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as it was supported by the local Chinese society. In 1946, while all schools were reregistered after World War II, Malaysia had had 1078 Chinese primary schools with the total of 168,303 students (Kua, 1999, pg.2-5). Wang Mei Qing and Yang Jian Sheng (2006) found out that Malay students are not facing huge difficulties in speaking or listening to Chinese, but it is harder for them to recognize and remember Chinese writings or characters. Hence, their results on Mandarin essay and Mandarin comprehension are not as good. Besides, they also faced difficulties on reading Chinese. Gaudart (1992) discussed about the typology of bilingual education in Malaysia, and stated that bilingual education in Malaysia is what Mackey termed as a “Transfer” variety. There are four types of transfer that she termed them as Initial Transfer, Re-transfer, Circular Transfer, and Gradual Transfer. In this case, for the Malay students who were enrolled in Chinese schools, the bilingual transfer type is similar to the “Circular Transfer”. Circular Transfer takes place when speakers of Malay dialects that are mutually intelligible with standard Bahasa Malaysia begin their education in Mandarin or Tamil medium elementary schools. After six months, their mother tongue is reinforced by the compulsory learning of Bahasa Malaysia. The students then had to learn English when they were in Standard 3 during the nineties. After six years of education in a Mandarin medium primary school, in secondary school, they were given a year’s intensive instruction in Bahasa Malaysia in the Remove Class. After completing the year, they switched to Bahasa Malaysia medium of instruction that is their mother tongue. According to Hyacinth, in 1983, about 1.15% of ethnic Malay primary school pupils were in this type of transfer. Ling (2009) conducted a research on factors contributing to the Malay parents enrolling their children to fewer students Chinese primary schools (SKMJJC) in Pahang state. Lin carried out fieldwork in these two schools and conducted interviews with 12 local parents. She found out that there were three factors that contributed to these Malay parents enrolling their children to SKMJJC. Firstly, they hoped that their children were able to compete with other Malaysians after they learned Mandarin, and were able to change their future economic situation. Secondly, the family’s economic background and parents’ attitude towards their children’s education would directly affect their children’s studies in Chinese school. Thirdly, the parents’ hope towards their children would affect their children’s performance too.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS:**

This research was conducted by using both quantitative (descriptive analysis) and qualitative methods. Firstly, the enrolment data of 14 Chinese primary schools’ students in Kelantan (based on races), from year 2000 to 2009 were collected to observe the trend of Malay students enrolling in Chinese schools during the research

period. Then, the questionnaire was distributed to 300 respondents (parents of the Malay students of the 14 schools) to find out the factors that contributed to them enrolling their children in Chinese primary schools, the benefits they gained in Chinese schools. The demographic background of the respondents was also analyzed to find out the types of parents' occupation, monthly household income level and education level, in order to know which group formed the majority group that enrolled their children in Chinese primary schools. Besides, a semi-structured interview was carried out among the selected schools' headmasters and 10 Malay parents who sent their children to Chinese schools, in order to obtain more in-depth opinions and answers.

**RESULTS:**

**Table 1: Number of Malay Students and Total Students in Kelantan Chinese Primary Schools**

Year	Number of Malay Students	Percentage	Total Students In Kelantan Chinese Primary Schools
2000	840	11.3%	7463
2004	911	12.6%	7205
2005	988	14.0%	7035
2008	1216	18.4%	6592
2009	1298	20.2%	6421

**Source:** Adapted from *Bilangan Murid Mengikut Ras dan Jantina Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan (Cina) Kelantan, 2000-2009* in Jabatan Pelajaran Negeri Kelantan (2009).

Table 1 shows the number of Malay students in Kelantan Chinese Primary Schools that had been increasing gradually from year 2000 to 2009. In year 2000, the percentage of Malay students in Kelantan Chinese Primary Schools is 11.3% whereas it increased to 20.2% after 9 years, in year 2009. The increment rate in the ten years had reached 54.5%, which was a positive increment. In other words, the average increment rate is 5.45%. Hence, it is believed that the number of Malay students in Kelantan Chinese Schools will keep on increasing.

**Table 2: Demographic Background of Respondents (Father and Mother)**

Variables	Frequency (Percentage)
<b>Occupation Types (Father)</b>	
Professional	11 (3.65%)
Semi-Professional	138 (46.00%)
Non-Professional	126 (42.00%)
Others	
-Retired	22 (7.33%)
-Deceased	3 (1.00%)
<b>Occupation Types (Mother)</b>	
Professional	2 ( 0.67%)
Semi-Professional	89 (29.66%)
Non-Professional	48 (16.00%)
Others	
-Housewife	160 (53.33%)
-Deceased	1 ( 0.33%)
<b>Monthly Household Income</b>	
Below RM1000	163 (54.30%)
RM1001-RM2000	49 (16.30%)
RM2001-RM3000	38 (12.70%)
RM3001-RM4000	16 ( 5.30%)
RM4001-RM5000	15 ( 5.00%)
Above RM5000	19 ( 6.30%)
<b>Education Level (Father)</b>	
Postgraduate	3 ( 1.00%)
Graduate (University)	34 (11.30%)
College/ Technical Institute	26 ( 8.70%)
Secondary School	196 (65.30%)

<b>Education Level (Mother)</b>	
Primary School	41 ( 13.70%)
Postgraduate	2 (0.70%)
Graduate (University)	27 (9.00%)
College/ Technical Institute	21 (7.00%)
Secondary School	201(67.00%)
Primary School	49 (16.30%)

The results of the data analysis, as seen in Table 2 reveal that the majority of the respondents (father) are semi-professionals (138 people, 46%). Most of them are involved in business or teaching. 30 of them (10%) are teachers. This is followed by 42% of them who are non-professionals, labors, drivers, rubber-tappers, gardeners and self-employed while only 3.65% of them are professionals (doctors, managers, pharmacists, lawyers, accountants). However, 53.33% of the respondents (mothers) are housewives that form the majority of the mothers' occupation type. 29.66% of the mothers' are semi-professionals (teachers, administration staff, businesswomen and nurses while there is only 0.67% of the mothers' who are professionals (pharmacists and lecturers). From this table, it appears that more than half of the research samples are from lower income families, as 54.3% of the respondents have less than RM1000 as their monthly household income. In addition, the education level of most of the parents is secondary school.

**Table 3: Advantages that the research subjects' children gain in Chinese primary school**

<i>Benefits</i>	<i>Frequency (Percentage)</i>
Able to converse in Chinese	143 ( 47.70%)
Know more friends of different races	91 (30.30%)
Better academic results	20 ( 6.67%)
More disciplined and hardworking	22 ( 7.33%)
Higher "survival" level	15 ( 5.00%)
Easier to understand Mathematics	9 ( 3.00%)

Table 3 reveals that 143 respondents stated the biggest advantage their children gain in Chinese primary school is the ability to able to converse in Chinese or Mandarin. The statistics results show nearly half of the respondents agree to this. Moreover, they are also able to learn Mandarin from their children indirectly. Besides, 30.3% of them said that the main advantage of sending their children at Chinese schools is that the children make more friends from different races. Meanwhile there were only 9 respondents who stated that the advantage their child gained in Chinese primary school is the fact that it becomes easier for them to understand Mathematics.

**Table 4: Average Mean Analysis of Factors Enrolling Child in Chinese Schools**

<i>Factors</i>	<i>Average Mean</i>	<i>Placement</i>
Child's future perspective	4.36	1
The formation of child's personality perspective	4.12	2
SJKC's Administration and Environment perspective	4.06	3
Academic perspective	4.05	4
Economic perspective	3.91	5
Culture perspective	3.77	6
General perspective	3.63	7
Mass media perspective	3.39	8
Social perspective	3.19	9

Table 4 shows that the highest average mean for analysis of factors enrolling child in Chinese schools is the "Child's future perspective" factor, its average mean is 4.36. While the other factors that are considered reaching the highest mean are "the formation of child's personality perspective" factor, "SJKC's Administration and Environment perspective" factor and "Academic perspective" factor. The lowest average mean for analysis of factors enrolling their children in Chinese schools is the "Social perspective" factor, with its average mean of 3.19.

## DISCUSSION:

The findings of the actual research reveal that the majority of the Malay parents who send their children to Kelantan Chinese Primary School are from lower income families. This differs from the researcher's hypothesis, that is, they would come from higher or medium income background. Besides, previous researches showed that the highest average mean for analysis of factors enrolling child in Chinese schools was the "Child's future perspective" factor, which was 4.36. This explains that most of the respondents who are from the lower income family hope that their children will have a brighter future by getting a better job, and hope their children will be able to change the situation of their respective families. However, the Malay students who studied in Chinese primary schools didn't get good results in Chinese, Science and Mathematics subjects. It was probably caused by environmental factors whereby these Malay students seldom had the chance to converse in Mandarin after school hours, lack of encouragement and support from their parents whenever they faced difficulties in their school homework. In spite of this, these Malay parents believe that their children will learn a third language which is Chinese Language, in terms of speaking, listening, reading and writing it. It would be an added advantage for their children to compete in the career field in the future. In short, the four factors which influence Malay parents in Kelantan to send their children to Chinese primary schools are "Child's future perspective", "The formation of child's personality perspective", "SJKC's Administration and Environment perspective" and "Academic perspective".

## CONCLUSION:

Today, the high number of the Malay students in Chinese primary schools in Kelantan has created a diverse learning environment in the school. Hence, it forms a platform that provides a chance for primary students to meet, interact and learn ways to integrate with other races in the school starting from their childhood. The integration can be achieved through this channel. So, the phenomenon of enrolment of Malay students in Chinese primary schools in Kelantan should not be seen as a problem, but should be accepted and welcomed by everyone with an open heart. However, Malay parents who wish to enroll their children in Chinese primary school should be prepared to spend more time and be more patient with their children. Lastly, although this is just a case study in the state of Kelantan, from the past ten years record of the increase of the phenomenon, it indeed shows that the trend consisting in enrolling Malay students in Chinese primary schools is increasing nationwide.

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