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A product evaluation of an alternative education programme for undocumented children in Sabah

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ABSTRACT

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This study is an evaluation of the Alternative Education Programme (AEP) at an alternative learning centre in a migrant settlement in the West Coast of Sabah. The study aim was to identify the outcomes of the programme on the students, teachers and community at the ALC site and examined these from the perspective of (1) the students' cognitive, affective and psychomotor domain, and (2) the community. This study employed a mixed method approach where qualitative data was derived from both in-depth and focus group interviews with parents, students and teachers. Quantitative data was obtained through a survey questionnaire administered on students. Findings indicated the students attaining higher levels in the cognitive domain after participating in the AEP and being able to apply the new knowledge in their daily lives. This pointed to them acquiring a significant advantage over their peers not enrolled in the AEP in terms of higher levels of psychomotor attainment and the ability to apply the acquired knowledge and skills in their daily lives and employment activities. For the community, a better understanding of the importance of education for the future of their children was inculcated. Students' involvement in religious, civics and citizenship learning demonstrated improved values and practice of religion and harmony among the villagers. The AEP has brought positive changes in attitude, behaviour and lifestyle in the community.

Keywords:

Alternative education programme,
Alternative learning centre,
Undocumented children

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1. Introduction

The goal of an alternative education programme (AEP) establishment in any migrant community is to ensure their children who are unable to access mainstream education could be provided opportunities to acquire basic learning in aspects such as civics, religious studies, reading, counting

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and writing. The long-term target of AEPs is to provide such children with sufficient knowledge and skills that would enable them gain employment or be self-sufficient in future. In Sabah, AEP as an education centre provides an alternative education pathway for the children of migrant communities (often illegal) who, due to lack of proper documentation, are unable to gain access or be assimilated into mainstream education in Malaysian government schools.

This study was conducted at an alternative learning center (ALC) situated in a settlement village on the fringes of Kota Kinabalu. Established through the partnership of various government and non-government agencies, the ALC is helmed by a Head Teacher with the assistance of three other teachers and has an enrolment consisting mostly children of migrants from neighbouring Philippines and Indonesia. In the context of this study, these children are referred to as refugees or undocumented. Despite being born in Malaysia, many children in the settlement are without official birth registration documents or certification. As such, they are classified as 'invisible' since they do not appear in any official databases; this 'non-existence' effectively excludes them from the rights and privileges accorded to bona-fide Malaysian citizens such as health care, education, welfare assistance and services, and assurance of security and protection under law.

2. Objectives of the study

The study sought to identify the outcomes of the programme on the students, teachers and community at the ALC site. The findings are anticipated to serve as reference for expansion and replication of the programme in similar contexts. It is hoped that the generated evidences could be used as a reference point in the design, development and implementation of a national alternative education policy.

3. Research questions

Three research questions were constructed to identify the outcomes of the AEP. The first research question focused on the intended outcomes of the programme whereas the second and third examined the unintended outcomes. Scriven [1] argues that goal-free evaluation (GFE) can be utilised or adapted for use with several other evaluation approaches, models, and methods. GFE could also be used with quantitative or qualitative data-collection since it has several benefits such as its control over goal orientation-related biases, uncovering side effects and avoiding the rhetoric of "true" goals. It adapts to contextual/environmental changes, aligns goals with actual programme activities and outcomes, and supplements the evaluation.

The research questions are as follow:

- i. What were the outcomes of the programme on the students?
 - a. What were the cognitive outcomes on the students?
 - b. What were the affective outcomes on the students?
 - c. What were the psychomotor outcomes on the students?
- ii. What were the outcomes of the programme on the community?

4. Literature review

The Context, Input, Process and Product Evaluation (CIPP) Model is a comprehensive framework for guiding evaluations of programmes, projects, institutions, and systems particularly those aimed at effecting long-term and sustainable improvements [2]. The product evaluation in this model is

suitable for impact studies since it is a summative evaluation conducted for the purpose of accountability which requires determination on the overall effectiveness of an implementation [3].

Product evaluation identifies and assesses programme outcomes; it measures, interprets and judges these outcomes by assessing their merit, worth and significance so as to ascertain the extent to which the needs of all the participants have been or are being fulfilled.

Stufflebeam and Shinkfield [4] suggest for a combination of techniques to be used to assess a comprehensive set of outcomes and cross-check various findings. Various techniques are applicable in product evaluations such as logs and diaries of outcomes, interviews of beneficiaries and other stakeholders, focus groups, document/ record retrieval and analysis. Feedback is very important during all phases of the project, including its conclusion. Stufflebeam and Shinkfield [4] stress that the communication component of the evaluation process is absolutely essential to assure that evaluation findings are appropriately used. Success in this part of the evaluation requires the meaningful and appropriate involvement of at least a representative sample of stakeholders throughout the entire evaluation process.

Unesco [5] highlighted that Alternative Learning Programmes (ALP) at Asia Pacific-Region share a few common features such as it involves intensive learning, reaching the unreached, the marginalized and the disadvantaged. The programmes intend to provide equivalent formal education system, employ flexible methodologies and link to lifelong learning, life skills, civic responsibility and global citizenship.

Past research by UNICEF [6] on AEPs in Sabah showed that the centers had brought about many positive impacts to their students and the communities in various aspects. For example, a study on the ALC in Kg. Numbak showed that in literacy, 80% of the students were able to read Malay and some English after attending AEP classes. In the spiritual nurture aspect, it was found that more children were attending the Islamic Friday prayers and proficient in reciting the Quran. Improvement was demonstrated in the aspect of self-management with the children showing more awareness of personal hygiene and the importance of exercise for personal health and well-being. A sense of citizenship and allegiance towards their host country (Malaysia) was developed in these children of migrants through daily activities in the centers such as singing the state and national anthem during the daily assembly.

Significant improvements were observed in aspects of hygiene, mannerism and overall cleanliness in the settlement as well. The ALC provided opportunities for the inculcation of teamwork and cooperation through sports and communal work, and a platform where valuable life skills that could be commercialized such as handicraft making and mending fishing nets could be taught.

The UNICEF research [7] at the Telipok settlement (established in 1980) found the community to be more adapted as they were more skillful and better able to engage in specialized odd jobs such as house repair or house building. As such, they were financially better off with some of them able to own cars. In terms of more concrete employment, some of them were able to get simple administrative jobs that paid relatively well as they could read and write.

5. Research methods

Product Evaluation which is a component of the Context, Input, Process and Product (CIPP) Model [3] was used to evaluate the implementation of the AEP at this settlement. Product evaluation assesses intended and unintended outcomes of a programme; in this evaluation, the outcomes of the AEP curriculum were assessed based on the curriculum elements. Additionally, the unintended outcomes on the students, teachers and community were also examined.

The evaluation involved the combining of qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis methods. Qualitative data was generated from in-depth and focus group interviews facilitated with the use of interview questions developed by the research team through a series of meetings and workshops. All qualitative methods used are summarised in Table 1. Prior to their interviews, the voluntary participants were asked to fill in an informed consent form. The interviews were voice recorded and later transcribed verbatim. Content analysis was performed on the transcriptions to obtain the findings.

Table 1
 Interview Methods and Respondents

Method	Respondents	Number of respondents
In-depth interview	Government Agency Official	1
	Head Teacher	1
Focus-group interview	Teachers	3
	Villagers	8
	JKKK members	4
	Students	36
	Alumni	5
Total		58

To complement the qualitative method, a survey questionnaire used in a similar study in the Kampung Numbak [6] was utilised to obtain data related to the outcomes on the students. This instrument, incorporating a proxy pre-test, consisted of 28 items with a three-point scale to measure the attainment of the students before and after the ALC learning. The items were clustered into three learning domains - cognitive, psychomotor and affective (Table 2). With assistance from the ALC teachers, the questionnaire was administered to all the students present on the day of data collection.

Table 2
 Domains and Items in Questionnaire

Domain	Item Number	Number of Items
Cognitive	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 12, 16, 17, 25	12
Psychomotor	10, 11, 23, 24	4
Affective	9, 13, 14, 15, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 26, 27, 28	12
Total		28

All 249 students were guided in responding to the items by the researchers and teachers. The instrument and its components were found to be reliable with the overall internal consistency (alpha) 0.873 as shown in Table 3.

Table 3
 The Overall Internal Consistency

Domain	No of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Cognitive	12	0.793
Psychomotor	4	0.539*
Affective	12	0.831
Total of items		28
Overall internal consistency		0.873

Several measures were effected to ensure the evaluation exercise protected the rights of both the stakeholders and children involved in the study. Firstly, the participation was voluntary and with the informed consent, expressed through the signing of consent forms, of the respondents. The purpose and scope of the study was explained to the informants before the commencement of the evaluation exercise. Secondly, the respondents’ privacy and confidentiality was secured through the use of pseudonyms in lieu of their actual identities in the resulting report.

Responses on the fixed-response items in the questionnaire were then analysed quantitatively with Quest [8], an interactive analysis software based on the Rasch’s model using Item Response Theory. Figure 3.1 shows the fit statistics for all the items in the questionnaire. The figure shows that all except item 22 and item 23 were fit with the in-fit mean square values of between 0.6 and 1.4. Item 25, 26 and 28 obtained perfect scores.

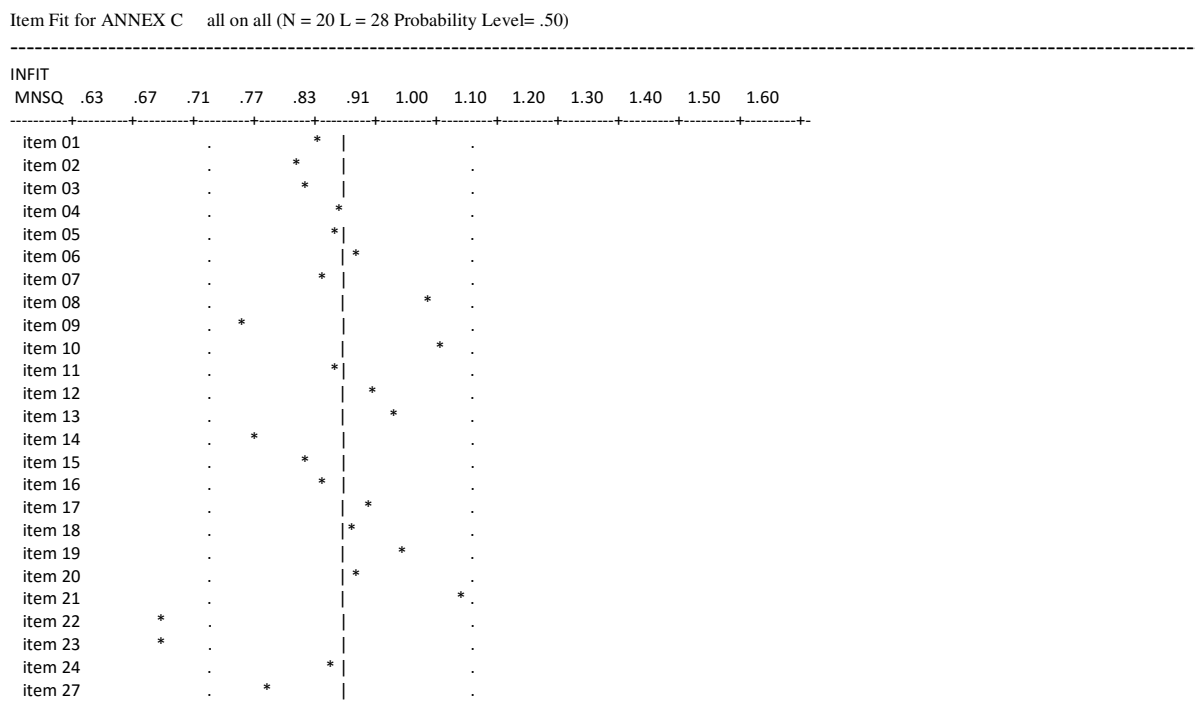


Fig. 5.1. Fit of the Items in the Survey Questionnaire

6. Findings

6.1. Outcomes of AEP on the psychomotor domain of students

The students demonstrated the attainment of higher levels in the cognitive domain after attending the AEP. They were found able to apply the knowledge learnt into their personal daily lives. There was also increased knowledge of religion, a progress subsequently translated into actual practice. From the interviews with the teachers, parents and villagers, it was evident that through the acquisition of basic literacy skills and counting, the children were more able to help their parents manage simple administrative tasks e.g. filling in particulars in official forms. Through the learning of skills attained at the ALC, the children were able to help their family members, many of whom were illiterate. This proved to be a significant advantage this group had over those not enrolled in the ALC.

Table 4 shows the mean for items that measured the students’ attainment of the cognitive domain before and after their AEP learning with notable increments in the mean values post- AEP.

Table 4
Mean for Items that Measured Attainment of Cognitive Domain

Item	Mean before ALC Learning	Mean after ALC Learning	Difference in Mean
B6 / C6	1.63	2.77	1.14
B7/ C7	2.70	2.88	0.18
B8/ C8	2.40	2.94	0.54
B9/ C9	2.67	2.94	0.27
B10/C10	2.51	2.85	0.34
B11/C11	2.77	2.99	0.22
B12/ C12	2.11	2.94	0.83
B13/ C13	2.75	2.97	0.22
B17/ C17	2.17	2.62	0.45
B21/C21	1.92	2.63	0.71
B22/C22	2.49	2.83	0.34
B30/ C30	2.22	2.47	0.25
Overall mean	2.36	2.82	0.46

The in-depth and focus-group interviews showed students attaining higher levels in the cognitive domain after the learning at the ALC. Item B6/C6 (*'saya boleh membaca'*) showed the largest difference in mean. The overall mean showed an increase of 0.46.

"Ada belajar English... belajar pasal... 'ear' sama 'nose'... 'cat'... 'fruits'.. Ya..tengok English punya [wayang]... faham.." (Interview with Students, 27/04/2015)

"...ibubapa cakap... mereka ... anak mereka... boleh baca subtitle di bawah TV tu..." (Interview with Teacher Hamidah, 28/04/2015)

"... jadi itu duit kalau kamu beli barang, katakan kamu bagi sepuluh ringgit, barang itu lima ringgit. Jadi balik berapa?"

"... balik lima ringgit." (Interview with Students, 27/04/2015)

6.2. Outcomes of AEP on the psychomotor domain of students

The students also indicated higher levels of psychomotor attainment and were able to apply the acquired knowledge and skills into their daily lives and employment activities. These skills ranged from the ability to produce paper handicraft to basket weaving that could be turned into a form of income generation.

Table 5 shows the mean for items that measured the attainment in the psychomotor domain of the students pre and post ALC. There were increments in the mean values after their AEP learning.

Table 5
Mean for Items that Measured the Attainment of Psychomotor Domain

Item	Mean before ALC Learning	Mean after ALC Learning	Difference in Mean
B15/ C15	1.54	1.69	0.18
B16/C16	2.21	2.63	0.42
B28/C28	1.58	1.82	0.24
B29/C29	1.77	2.01	0.24
Overall mean	1.78	2.04	0.27

Item B16/C16 (*'saya ada kemahiran kraf kertas'*) showed the largest difference in mean. The overall mean showed an increase of 0.27.

“Buat bakul ada... buat tu keychain... kita dedahkan kepada murid-murid.” (Interview with Head Teacher, 28/04/2015)

“...boleh.... boleh buat [bakul]...” (Interview with Students, 27/04/2015)

6.3. Outcomes of AEP on the affective domain of students

The AEP resulted in positive changes of attitude among the students. They were able to put into practice their newly acquired or enhanced religious knowledge and understanding which subsequently led to significant attitudinal improvements among them. This increased attunement was demonstrated in practices such as being proactive in reciting prayers and readiness or ability in reading the Quran as well as fasting during Ramadhan.

Table 6 shows the mean for items that measured the students’ attainment of affective domain before and after their AEP learning. Increments in the mean values were indicated after AEP learning.

Table 6
Mean for Items that Measured the Attainment of Affective Domain

Item	Mean before ALC Learning	Mean after ALC Learning	Difference in Mean
B14/C14	2.39	2.85	0.46
B18/C18	2.32	2.75	0.43
B19/C19	2.25	2.74	0.49
B20/C20	2.40	2.73	0.33
B23/C23	2.78	3.00	0.22
B24/C24	2.72	2.98	0.26
B25/C25	2.56	2.87	0.31
B26/C26	2.78	2.94	0.16
B27/C26	2.67	2.92	0.25
B31/C32	2.82	2.92	0.10
B32/C32	2.79	2.93	0.14
B33/C33	2.63	2.76	0.13
overall mean	2.59	2.87	≈0.27

During the interviews, students shared that they were now incorporating their acquired religious knowledge or understanding into their daily lives. Item B19/C19 (*‘saya boleh bersolat’*) showed the largest difference in mean. The overall mean indicated an increase of about 0.27.

“... kami pandai doa...” (Interview with Students, 27/04/2015)

“...saya pandai puasa...” (Interview with Students, 27/04/2015)

Changes in attitude and discipline among the students were reported by the teachers who found them able to queue up properly, politer and showing greater respect for others. The teachers also pointed out that the students were more aware of the features and virtues of good character as well as being disciplined and cooperative.

“... dia orang ada iniatif...ada perancangan ...” (Interview with Teacher Ana, 28/04/2015)

A teacher believed the observed positive behavioural changes in the ALC students was a factor in the decline of undesirable activities such as glue sniffing in the settlement. The learning provided in the ALC helped in reshaping the character, motivation, and thinking of the students. The education provided here helped reduce or negate any bad influence by bad-intentioned peers and the surroundings. Schooling and engagement in learning provided a means of not only becoming literate but also acquiring a better personality.

“...dulu hisap gam... bermain judi... sudah tau, oh hari ni saya mau pergi sekolah” (Interview with Teacher Hamidah, 28/04/2015)

In addition, the rules and regulations put in practice in the ALC helped expose the students to an environment of discipline, order and accepted norms of behaviour.

“...mereka boleh mendisplinkan diri sendiri... contoh dia, dorang tidak akan panjang kuku, panjang rambut, pakaian dorang kemas...” (Interview with Teacher Hamidah, 28/4/2015)

The changes occurring in their children were noticed by parents when the former started demonstrating elements of responsible behaviour and a keenness to learn and attend school.

“..dari segi kemalasan tu, dorang rajin sudah pergi sekolah...” (Interview with Parents, 28/4/2015)

The ALC provided a venue for the students to explore at length their abilities and talents which might otherwise be hidden and suppressed within them in the absence of viable outlets. Co-curriculum is therefore essential apart from daily teaching and learning since it creates a platform for students to showcase their talents.

“... dia dari segi kelab kebudayaan kalau dorang sudah belajar menari menari di sekolah ini, lepas itu dorang akan buat persembahan di majlis-majlis perkahwinan” (Interview with Teacher Hamidah, 28/04/15)

Self- esteem and sense of ownership or belonging were further amplified when excellent performance or output was acknowledged, in this case winning or excelling in sports or activities when representing their ALC in competitions or tournaments.

“Contohnya yang bola sepak itu kan sampai kami main futsal di Jesselton sana, dapat apa kita, Johan ka, lelaki, Naib Johan lawan sekolah-sekolah dari Pantai Barat dari Lapurai, Kinarut, Numbak.” (Interview with Teacher Sarah, 28/04/15)

There was increased awareness of the environment among the students; this was reflected when they showed initiatives to prevent soil erosion in the village.

“...yang macam di sekolah atas tu kan. Yang timbun-timbun tanah, hari sabtu...” (Interview Teacher Sarah, 28/04/2015)

“...untuk mengelakkan hakisan bah tu maksud dia...” (Interview with Teacher Hamidah, 28/4/2015)

6.4. Outcomes of AEP on community

The implementation of the AEP created positive impacts on the community. Seeing the benefits that learning had brought on the young learners, the community were able to appreciate and understand more the role of education and schooling for the future of the children of the settlement community. The involvement of students in religious, civics and citizenships learning initiated improvement in values and strengthened the religious practice and harmony among the villagers. The AEP thus encouraged positive attitude, behavioural and lifestyle changes in the community.

‘...kami ada perancangan untuk buat satu sekolah..sekolah tahfiz yang menghafal al-Quran.” (Interview with Head Teacher, 28/04/2015)

“... bertambahnya penduduk...dia punya masyarakat sudah bersatu padu... walaupun ada perkara-perkara yang melibatkan pergaduhan, senang diselesaikan...” (Interview with Head Teacher, 28/04/2015)

“..kalau dulu mereka... lepak sini, lepak sana...tapi bila wujudnya sekolah ini, mereka tidak lagi begitu...mereka akan tumpukan diri mereka time belajar kepada belajar.” (Interview with Head Teacher, 28/04/2015)

“ .. kita hidup di sini ikutlah cara hidup sini (Malaysia)...” (Interview with Head Teacher, 28/04/2015)

“...Biasalah yang lepak-lepak, banyak buang masa, diorang tidak terurus bah... ada sekolah ni, diorang terus ada inisiatif. Sudah tau, oh hari ni saya mau pergi sekolah. Ah.. Diorang sudah ada perancangan.” (Interview with Teacher Ana, 28/04/2015)

7. Conclusion

The ALC was established to address a perceived need for children who for various reasons were excluded from participating in mainstream education in government schools. The curriculum, a much abridged or simplified version of the national curriculum, sought to equip learners with the rudiments of formal education so as to enable them acquire the basic skills and knowledge necessary to enter the job market, albeit at a low entry level. The ability to read, write and count enabled the learners to seek jobs that utilized these skills and move away from a life of unemployment and odd- job labor that would otherwise be among the very few options available to them.

The learning acquired at the ALC serves as an agent of change for the students, teachers, and the community of migrant or transient families. On one hand is the new learning which empowers them with better opportunities and skills for a better livelihood. On another level is the attitudinal and behavioral changes in the students which indirectly influence their family members and people who interact with them. The change in perspective and behavior allows the learners and those connected to them be open to the opportunities and possibilities that learning, knowledge, and positivity can create. As can be deduced from the AEP provided by the ALC, although the outcomes directly benefit the children as the frontline recipients, the brush- on effect of whatever transformation occurs in the child is passed on to the parents and families. The smaller effects on this group assume a bigger significance when the families come together as a community.

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