

Mother-tongue link to ridding poverty

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KOTA KINABALU: Mother tongue literacy among indigenous children is important as it has a direct correlation with the eradication of poverty.

Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) Vice Chancellor, Prof. Datuk Seri Panglima Dr Kamaruzaman Ampon said this during the launching of a five-day International Workshop Fieldworks Software 2011, on Monday.

His speech was delivered by the UMS Director of Research and Innovation, Dr. Felix Tongkul.

"Worldwide studies have shown that when children learn to read in their mother tongue in their early years, they can easily shift later into a national language, even if the national language is very different from their native language such as English, Spanish or French.

"This is because their conceptual understanding and literacy proficiency are allowed to develop properly in their mother tongue, which leads to multiple language proficiency, which in turn leads to higher educational standards and greater opportunities for tertiary education.

"These educated indigenous people are then able to develop communities and lead governments. Thus, mother tongue literacy among children has direct correlation with the eradication of poverty," said Kamaruzaman.

He pointed out that everyone has a role to play in this with parents having the most important role in

speaking in their mother tongue to their children.

NGOs and cultural associations should also promote their mother tongues through publishing phonologically correct materials and on actively speaking their languages.

Commenting on the workshop, Kamaruzaman expressed hope that the participants would benefit from it.

"It is our hope that participants in this workshop will learn to use the Fieldworks software as tools for both dictionary compilation and also for storing ethnographic data, with a view to documenting their cultural heritage and developing more literacy materials in their mother tongue.

"There are many different kinds of dictionaries that can be compiled, from simple phrase books, to standard dictionaries, to special dictionaries such as cultural dictionaries, botanical dictionaries, medical dictionaries and others that focus on traditional knowledge.

"It is hoped that this workshop will inspire participants to go beyond dictionary compilation, however, to writing extensively in their own languages and to build up a body of written literature to ensure the sustainability of mother tongues for future generations," said Kamaruzaman.

The workshop is the second, the first being held in 2007 here, organised by the Centre for the Promotion of Knowledge and Language Learning (PPIB) UMS, the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) International



(From right): Dr Jacqueline, Tongkul, McKaughan, Ismail and Ahmad.

Malaysia, the Kadazandusun Chair and the Malaysian Association of Mixed Methods Research.

The workshop aims to collaborate closely through joint research, lecturing, international publications, work on early childhood mother tongue education, mother tongue literacy and other academic pursuits.

A Letter of Intent between PPIB and SIL International was inked during the launching of the workshop to formally establish the relationship.

"In the very near future, we plan to cement this relationship with the signing of an Memorandum of Understanding," said Kamaruzaman.

Also present were Consultant of SIL International, Dr. Howard McKaughan, PIBB Dean, Dr. Ismail Ali, Malaysian Association of Mixed Methods Research President, Dr Ahmad Tarmizi and holder of the Kadazandusun Chair in UMS, Dr. Jacqueline Pugh-Kitingan.