

THE EXPERIENCE OF ORANG ASLI STUDENTS TOWARDS GUIDANCE AND COUNSELING SERVICES

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the experiences of Orang Asli students with guidance and counseling services in an Orang Asli village school, focusing on their motivations, experiences, and challenges in accessing these services. The study has three main objectives: to identify the motivations that lead Orang Asli students to seek guidance and counseling services, to understand their experiences with these services, and to explore the challenges they face in accessing them. Using a qualitative, phenomenological approach, the study selected three upper secondary students through purposeful sampling. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, and triangulation with multiple data sources was used to ensure validity and reliability. Analysis of the interviews identified themes related to external and internal motivations, emotions, thoughts, and behaviors, as well as external and internal challenges. The findings offer insights for stakeholders, including parents, the Ministry of Education (KPM), the Department of Orang Asli Development (JAKOA), school administrators, and future researchers, highlighting areas for support and improvement.

Keywords: Orang Asli students, guidance and counseling

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the need to address the educational and psychological support requirements of Orang Asli students has gained increasing recognition in Malaysia. Orang Asli students, particularly those from the Orang Asli community, often face unique challenges that can impact their educational experiences and outcomes. This study focuses on the experiences of Orang Asli students with counseling and guidance services at SMK Bawong, a secondary school situated in a region with a significant Orang Asli population.

The Orang Asli, Malaysia's Orang Asli peoples, represent a diverse group with distinct cultural practices and socio-economic challenges. Despite efforts to integrate supportive services within the educational system, there is limited research exploring how these services are perceived and experienced by Orang Asli students. Understanding these experiences is crucial for enhancing the effectiveness of counseling and guidance programs tailored to their needs.

This qualitative research employs a phenomenological approach to delve into the lived experiences of three senior Orang Asli students who have utilized counseling and guidance services at SMK Bawong, Sg Siput, Perak. Through in-depth interviews, this study aims to explore several key objectives: first, identify the factors that motivate Orang Asli students to seek counseling and guidance services; second, gain insights into their personal experiences with these services; and third, understand the challenges they encounter in accessing and benefiting from the available support.

By addressing these objectives, this study seeks to contribute valuable insights into the adaptation and implementation of counseling services for Orang Asli students. The findings are intended to inform educators, policymakers, and practitioners about the specific needs and barriers faced by Orang Asli students, ultimately supporting the development of more effective and culturally responsive counseling programs.

PROBLEM STATEMENTS

The experience of communities with guidance and counseling services has been a topic of study for a long time. For example, Hazira Hamsi et al. (2022) conducted research exploring the knowledge, competencies, and challenges of guidance and counseling teachers with regard to special education students. Similarly, Shima and Abu Yazid (2019) studied the need for guidance and counseling services among rural secondary school students. The findings indicate that rural secondary school students seek more academic and career assistance from their guidance and counseling teachers compared to personal and social needs.

Although this service is available for all students, research on it is still quite limited. This suggests a research gap, particularly a lack of studies regarding the experiences of Orang Asli students with these services. Therefore, this study aims to bridge this gap and examine the experiences of Orang Asli students with the guidance and counseling services available in their communities.

OBJECTIVE

The purpose of this study has been to follow specific research objectives, which are:

1. To explore the factors that motivate Orang Asli students to seek guidance and counseling services in school.
2. To examine the experiences of Orang Asli students with guidance and counseling services in school.
3. To investigate the challenges faced by Orang Asli students in accessing guidance and counseling services in school.

METHODOLOGY

This study used purposive sampling techniques involving three high school students who have received guidance and counseling services. The study followed a structured set of procedures to ensure thorough data collection and analysis. Initially, an interview protocol was developed, designed to align with the research objectives, and reviewed by the supervising lecturer for accuracy.

This protocol included semi-structured questions to facilitate detailed participant responses about their experiences with school guidance and counseling services. Following protocol approval, the researcher sought permission from the Ministry of Education Malaysia's Planning and Research Policy Division (eRAS) on May 25, 2024, receiving conditional approval on June 5, 2024, subject to further consent from the Daily School Management Division and school administrators.

Due to difficulties contacting the Daily Management Division, permission was subsequently obtained from the Perak State Education Department on June 11, 2024, with additional conditions to avoid disrupting classroom activities. The researcher then acquired approval from the Kuala Kangsar District Education Office on June 14, 2024, and began data collection on June 25, 2024. After conducting interviews, the researcher transcribed the data within a week. The transcription was then organized using NVIVO 14 software, which facilitated the thematic coding and categorization of the data, to be presented in tabular format in Chapter 4 for clearer interpretation and analysis.

RESULTS

In the data findings section of this study, the researcher presents the results obtained through a qualitative approach, organized by themes related to the interview questions.

Table 1 General information of the participants

Participant	Age	Gender	Number Of Session Attended
1	16	Male	3
2	17	Female	2
3	17	Female	3

Motivations for seeking guidance and counseling services

This section examines the motivations that drive Orang Asli students to seek guidance and counseling services at school. Data analysis reveals that these motivations are multifaceted, encompassing both external and internal factors. Externally, students are often encouraged by influential figures in their lives, such as teachers and parents, who recognize the benefits of these services for academic success and personal development. This encouragement serves as a crucial support system, empowering students with the confidence to utilize counseling resources.

Internally, students are motivated by a desire for self-improvement, guided by personal goals and aspirations. Academic ambitions drive some students to seek guidance to navigate the educational system more effectively and enhance their performance. Additionally, motivations for personal growth include managing emotional challenges, developing stronger interpersonal skills, and preparing for future career opportunities. These motivations illustrate the significant roles of both personal ambition and external support in prompting Orang Asli students to pursue guidance and counseling services.

Table 2 Motivations for Seeking Guidance and Counseling Services

Themes	Category	Subtheme	PK1	PK2	PK3
External Influences	Teacher	Directly	/		
		Indirectly	/		/
	Friends	Directly			/
		Indirectly			
	Parents	Directly		/	
Personal Aspirations	-	Intentionally	/	/	
		Unintentionally	/		/

Experiences with Guidance and Counseling Services

Orang Asli students' experiences with guidance and counseling services are shaped by a complex blend of emotional, cognitive, and behavioral factors. Positive experiences are often marked by feelings of being understood and validated, which significantly enhance students' willingness to engage with these services. When counselors demonstrate empathy and cultural sensitivity, students are more likely to view the counseling process as beneficial and supportive. This perception fosters a sense of trust and safety, allowing students to discuss their concerns and challenges openly. In contrast, negative experiences frequently arise from counselors' lack of cultural understanding or sensitivity. When students feel misunderstood, judged, or stigmatized, they may become reluctant or even avoid further engagement with counseling services altogether. This disconnect can create barriers to effective communication, diminishing the perceived value of the services and preventing students from fully benefiting from the support offered.

Table 3 Experiences with Guidance and Counseling Services

Themes	Category	PK1	PK2	PK3
Emotional Aspects	Tranquility	/	/	/
	Emotion Management	/	/	/
	Enthusiastic		/	/
Cognitive Aspects	Problem Management	/	/	/
	Applying Self-Talk Technique		/	/
	Prioritize Others' Feelings	/		/
Behavior Aspects	Positive	/	/	/
	Negative			

Challenges in Accessing Guidance and Counseling Services

Orang Asli students face both external and internal challenges in accessing guidance and counseling services, reflecting broader systemic issues as well as personal barriers. Externally, a major obstacle is the lack of culturally sensitive counseling approaches that address the unique needs and perspectives of Orang Asli students. Many feel that existing services fail to resonate with their cultural backgrounds, leading to a sense of alienation. Limited access to services specifically tailored to Orang Asli students further complicates the issue, as they may struggle to find appropriate support when needed. Internally, students often contend with mistrust or fear of judgment, arising from past negative experiences or the general stigma associated with seeking help. These internal barriers can create reluctance to seek counseling, as students may worry about being perceived as weak or incapable. Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort to develop more inclusive, culturally responsive counseling practices and foster an environment that encourages students to seek support without fear of stigma or judgment.

Table 4 Challenges in Accessing Guidance and Counseling Services

Themes	Category	PK1	PK2	PK3
External Challenges	Appropriateness Of the Teacher's Time	/		/
	Appropriate Infrastructure	/		
Internal Challenges	Stigma Against Counseling	/	/	/
	Energy Constraints	/		
External Challenges	Appropriateness Of the Teacher's Time	/		/

DISCUSSION

This study's findings provide crucial insights into Orang Asli students' experiences with guidance and counseling services, identifying key areas for enhancement. In addressing the first objective, the study shows that students' motivations to seek guidance and counseling stem from both external influences and internal aspirations. External support, particularly from teachers and parents, plays a pivotal role in encouraging initial engagement, helping students overcome hesitation and validating their choice to seek help. Internally, students are driven by a desire for both academic and personal growth, underscoring the importance of fostering supportive environments at home and in school. For Orang Asli students to feel encouraged and empowered to use these services, schools and educators should

actively promote the benefits of guidance and counseling, ensuring students understand the available support and feel welcomed to access it.

Regarding the second objective, the study highlights that students' experiences with counseling vary significantly based on the quality of interactions and the degree of cultural sensitivity displayed by counselors. Positive experiences, where students felt understood and supported, were linked to counselors' empathy and cultural competence. This suggests that cultural sensitivity is essential for effective counseling. In contrast, negative experiences often stemmed from a perceived lack of cultural understanding, fostering feelings of alienation and mistrust. These findings point to a critical need for counselor training programs that enhance cultural awareness and sensitivity, equipping counselors to better support Orang Asli students. Improving the quality of these interactions is essential for making counseling services more inclusive, impactful, and beneficial to students' well-being and development.

The third objective addresses the challenges Orang Asli students face in accessing guidance and counseling services, identifying both external and internal barriers. Externally, the lack of culturally tailored services remains a significant hurdle, as students may struggle to connect with services that do not consider their unique cultural context. This finding suggests a need to reassess how counseling services are designed and delivered, advocating for a more tailored approach that reflects Orang Asli students' specific needs. Internally, students often face mistrust and fear of judgment, compounded by societal stigma around mental health and counseling, particularly within Orang Asli communities. These internal barriers can discourage students from seeking help. Overcoming these challenges requires a comprehensive approach, including raising awareness about the benefits of counseling, fostering positive attitudes toward seeking help, and actively reducing stigma. Collaboration between schools and communities is essential for building a supportive environment where students feel safe and respected in accessing the services they need.

Overall, the findings indicate that while Orang Asli students are motivated to seek guidance and counseling, a range of barriers prevent them from fully utilizing these services. By addressing both external and internal challenges, and by promoting cultural sensitivity and awareness, educators and policymakers can work toward creating counseling services that genuinely meet Orang Asli students' needs. Such improvements are essential for establishing an educational environment where all students, regardless of cultural background, have access to the support they need to thrive.

IMPLICATION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study offer critical insights for designing, implementing, and delivering guidance and counseling services that better support Orang Asli students. Firstly, the motivations identified highlight the importance of external support systems, such as family and educators, in encouraging Orang Asli students to seek counseling. This suggests that schools should actively involve parents and teachers in promoting these services. Educating these key figures about the benefits of counseling and equipping them with strategies to support students can enhance the overall effectiveness of these services. Schools might consider developing programs that engage parents and community leaders directly, fostering a supportive environment that extends beyond school walls and into the broader community. Such initiatives can strengthen students' motivation to access counseling, knowing that their support networks are invested in their well-being.

The study also emphasizes the essential role of cultural sensitivity in the counseling experience. Students' varied experiences, ranging from feeling understood and supported to feeling alienated and misunderstood, underscore the need for culturally competent counseling to ensure effective service delivery. This has significant implications for counselor training and development. Comprehensive training programs are needed to equip counselors with the cultural competence required to understand and respect Orang Asli students' diverse backgrounds. This training should encompass an understanding of cultural values, traditions, and communication styles, which can significantly influence the counseling process. Additionally, recruiting counselors from similar cultural backgrounds or with experience in Orang Asli communities could further enhance the relevance and effectiveness of these services.

The challenges identified in accessing guidance and counseling services point to the need for systemic changes to make these services more accessible and culturally relevant. The lack of tailored services reveals a gap in current counseling provisions that requires attention through policy and practice adjustments. Educational institutions and policymakers must recognize the unique needs of Orang Asli students and develop services that are both accessible and culturally appropriate. This might include integrating Orang Asli perspectives into the curriculum, offering bilingual counseling options, and ensuring that counseling approaches are adaptable to students' cultural contexts. Furthermore, schools could establish partnerships with Orang Asli organizations and community leaders to design community-informed counseling programs. Such collaborations provide valuable insights into students' needs and help develop services that are genuinely responsive to their experiences.

Internally, the feelings of mistrust and fear of judgment identified in this study highlight the importance of creating a more supportive, stigma-free environment within schools. Addressing these internal barriers requires a sustained effort to normalize counseling use and reduce the stigma associated with seeking help. Schools could implement awareness campaigns and workshops that educate students, staff, and the broader community about mental health and the benefits of counseling. By fostering a positive, open dialogue around mental health, schools can contribute to a culture where seeking help is viewed as a strength rather than a weakness. Additionally, peer support programs could be developed to encourage students to support one another in accessing counseling services, reducing the isolation and fear that may otherwise discourage them.

In summary, these findings suggest that a comprehensive approach is essential to improve the accessibility and effectiveness of guidance and counseling services for Orang Asli students. This approach requires collaboration between schools, families, communities, and policymakers to create a supportive environment that encourages and facilitates students' use of counseling services. By addressing both external and internal barriers identified in this study, educational institutions can work towards ensuring that all students, regardless of cultural background, have access to the support they need for academic and personal success. These changes are crucial for promoting equity and inclusivity in education and for supporting the holistic development of Orang Asli students.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the experiences of Orang Asli students with school-based guidance and counseling services, focusing on their motivations, encounters, and the challenges they face. The findings reveal that Orang Asli students often encounter considerable obstacles in accessing these services, driven by both external and internal factors. External challenges include social stigma, time limitations, and logistical issues, such as limited availability of services and an environment that may not feel conducive to counseling. Internally, personal and emotional factors can inhibit students' willingness to seek help, underscoring the layered nature of the challenges they face and the need for tailored interventions.

A central finding is the impact of supportive relationships in encouraging Orang Asli students to utilize counseling services. Teachers, peers, and family members play a crucial role by offering encouragement and fostering a safe space for students to share their concerns. Understanding and empathetic teachers, in particular, significantly increase students' comfort in seeking help. However, the study highlights a gap in cultural sensitivity and awareness among some educators, which can diminish the effectiveness of counseling services. This finding emphasizes the importance of training and awareness programs for teachers to help them better understand and address the unique cultural backgrounds of Orang Asli students.

The study concludes with several recommendations to enhance the accessibility and effectiveness of counseling services for Orang Asli students. There is a strong need for improved infrastructure, including more accessible counseling facilities and resources specifically designed for Orang Asli students. Additionally, incorporating cultural sensitivity into counselor and educator training programs is essential. By addressing these challenges and drawing on the support systems within students' communities, schools can play a more active role in fostering the psychological and emotional well-being of Orang Asli students, ultimately creating a more inclusive and supportive educational environment.

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