

## PalArch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt / Egyptology

### THE NEEDS OF THE RURAL COMMUNITY IN THE EDUCATION DELIVERY SYSTEM

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**Mahatir Yahaya, Farhana Kamarul Bahrin, Masarah Mohamad Yusof, Azlinda Azman. The Needs of the Rural Community in the Education Delivery System-- Palarch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt/Egyptology 17(10) (2020), 1995-2003. ISSN 1567-214X.**

**Keywords: rural community, education, delivery system.**

#### ABSTRACT

An effective delivery system is important in the dissemination of any information pertaining to education for society. The core of any education programs conducted in schools may not have the desired effect if an ineffective mode of delivery is utilised. Therefore, this research is designed to identify the needs of the community, especially parents in rural areas, in attaining information from school authorities. This research is qualitative in nature and has chosen a school in Baling, Kedah as the primary location of investigation. A total of 10 parents have been involved in an in-depth interview process. A themed analysis is used to analyse the obtained data. The results suggest that the community in Baling are in need of social inclusion such as communal involvement in ensuring information with regard to education programs are received. In addition, they require an in-community approach (bottom-up approach) to ensure they receive the details of the aforementioned programs in school. Organisations within the community can be seen as entities helping parents to access information from schools using the bottom-up approach.

#### INTRODUCTION

The concept of education requires that cocurriculum is built into an organized and efficient delivery system to improve the quality of learning (Idris & Nik Pa, 2008). The formation of cocurricular education needs to be in par with an effective delivery system to ensure the knowledge and information is received by the intended recipients, especially those in rural areas. Ibrahim and Abd Karim (2004) in their research on the efficiency the Malaysian government in the managing the services sector, found that the income of members of society play a role in the improvement of a government's efficiency in the management of available services such as the channeling of information to the

community. This is closely related to the use of technology. An efficient delivery system paves the way for better information communication that is more effective in the handling of government affairs, especially education. Thus, it is clear that the delivery system is necessary for those living in rural regions, specifically with regard to education. However, there is a persistent problem of insufficient channeling of information to those in rural areas. This is supported by Mohamed et al. (2012), whereby the rural folk are deprived of information due to the digital gap that exists among them. As a result, this article finds that the people living in the district of Baling located toward the north of Malaysia, faces this ineffective delivery problem specifically with regard to the parents' information accessibility of programs conducted by the schools. The Assistant District Education Officer of Baling, Mr. Asmadi Abdul Rahim (personal communication, 13 May, 2013), concurs that only 30 percent of all parents attend school programs, including the Parents and Teachers Association (PTA) meetings. This tally is far lower than the targeted attendance aimed by every school for their respective programs. The numbers are so because schools use printed media (i.e. letters and flyers) to inform others about their activities. Schools in rural districts do not have access to modern media such as email and What's app application to use as intermediary medium with parents. This is owed to the fact that, in general, parents in these areas lack access to these applications. This may be due to hardships in life such as poverty that affects rural areas most and hence, becomes a primary problem for the government to disseminate information (Wisniewski & Olafsson, 2004). Thus, this article is meant to consider the needs of parents in attaining the necessary information regarding the programs conducted in the schools of their children.

## METHODOLOGY

The problems faced by the delivery system in society demands a detailed consideration. This is supported by Merriam (1998) that suggests that the cultural research surrounding a society, or a community of people and families are best analysed through the lens of case studies and qualitative data. Therefore, this research is qualitative-based with the use of case studies as the research design. Qualitative research is able to produce data that is rich in information, but complex and would require the interpretation based on literature review that is carried out at the start of research (Siti Uzairiah, 2017). Qualitative research focuses on the clear understanding and in-depth explanation of a certain phenomenon that is being researched and not based on measurements or calculations. Purposive sampling techniques is used to fulfil the need for sampling research and is in line with recommendations set by Babbie (2004). This method is appropriate to obtain respondents that provide enough data regarding the study. Researchers choose respondents that are able to provide sufficient information to provide insight into the issue of a poor delivery system in the Baling area. This is to ensure researchers attain data that matches the objectives of the study. The choice of respondent is purposive. With regard to data collection techniques, researchers use an in-depth interview process to obtain the verified and relevant information. This paper utilizes semi-structured interview technique. This is because according to Merriem (1998), the use of semi-structured interviewing techniques is flexible and this enables the respondents to explain what they think to the researcher.

The semi-structured questions used were to ask how they obtained program information. The data obtained from the interviews were then analyzed using themed analysis. The summary of the methodology used is as follows:

Summary of Methodology	
Research Method	Qualitative
Research Design	Case Study
Research Approach	Inductive
Research Sampling	Purposive Sampling
Number of Respondents	10 Parents
Data Collection Technique	In-depth interview
Research Instrument	Research Question (semi-structure) Guide
Research analysis	Themed Analysis

## RESULTS OF RESEARCH

The results of the study found that all of the respondents agreed that their easiest means to get information is via face-to-face communication, rather than using virtual or other mediums. They prefer to get information from their own communities. They also lack the skills in obtaining school information or activities other than using letter-based methods provided by school teachers.

If I were given the choice, I would rather meet someone if I want to know something. Because by meeting them, I can ask them more things.

### *Respondent 1*

I would rather meet and talk directly. Because from meeting directly, I can ask them anything if I don't understand.

### *Respondent 2*

That's why talking directly to the teacher is much better. Because you can find out anything

### *Respondent 3*

Meeting directly and asking them what you need to know is much better than using the letter.

### *Respondent 4*

When I see it directly, I can be sure of the advantages of letting my child attend the program. I can also study the contents of the same program at school.

### *Respondent 5*

Based on the parents' responses, there are two things that these parents need. They often expect the help or involvement of local communities to get

information on educational programs run by schools. Community involvement, such as resident advocates, can help them access that information by serving as intermediaries between parents and schools.

In addition, it appears that these parents do not have their own initiatives to attain information on school programs. They are comfortable with the services provided by the government, in the sense that the school always provides information on every program, explaining the parents' lack of independence in obtaining the program information. They wait for the school or teachers to give them the information. Hence, they are in need of an approach that can help them work within the community in the dispersal of information regarding the programs conducted in schools.

We just do not know how to gain information about the school

***Respondent 6***

But if we had to meet, I would be terrified to go to the school.

***Respondent 7***

Even I do not know what to do.

***Respondent 8***

I do not really know what to do. If someone else asks, it would be much easier

***Respondent 9***

If someone else gets the information, then they inform me when we meet up.

***Respondent 10***

In conclusion, the Baling community needs better social inclusion through the involvement of local communities in helping them access information about educational programs. They also need good skills or approaches to obtain the appropriate information. These two steps will reduce the aforementioned problem. It will reduce time, financial, cost, resources, and attitude barriers in accessing program information. When the Baling community acquire help via the local community involvement and has a working approach within the community, the information regarding the educational programs being conducted at the school will be well received by the parents.

**DISCUSSION**

Once the participation from the local community has been identified as not up to par, support from various parties should be prioritised to rural communities such as Baling. This is because community involvement in this educational information delivery system will help parents get information about programs being carried out in schools. It can also help parents provide feedback to the

schools. This collaboration will facilitate the dissemination of information on school activities to parents without the use of students.

### ***Social Inclusion***

The inclusion or involvement in community development especially in the field of education in schools is still at a dismal rate. It requires the highest form of support from many parties. It is also a necessity for the Baling community in helping to provide educational program information to parents. This is in line with the government's efforts in the Malaysian Education Development Plan (2015-2025), which emphasizes the collaboration of communities, parents, and schools in improving the quality of student learning by focusing on the programs implemented in schools. Hence, social inclusion is seen as a fundamental need in this research issue.

Some parents reveal that they need the support of others in getting information on school activities and providing feedback to the school. This is because members of a community can make changes to their community by obtaining information and disseminating information between the community and those who assist help facilitate a two-way process of information exchange. When this information exchange activity takes place, the shared ideas can be mulled over to help achieve the community's objectives. This is seen as a learning process in the community because information is shared between parents, the community and the facilitator. This activity is seen as a catalyst for other community members to get involved in the process of community development especially in the field of education.

With regard to this issue, the involvement of the rural community can be seen as a key component of helping others obtain educational program information. This is because the local community is closest group to the parents. The theory of human ecology suggests the microsystem is the closest environment to a person. It refers to familial relationships and interactions within it. For example, discussions between parents and children. However, when it comes to the issue of the delivery intended for the education system, it is seen that interactions between friends, neighbours and teachers are important in the process of disseminating information about the activities conducted in schools. Local communities are the most important agents of socialization in the dissemination of educational information in rural regions. The influence of a person's behavior arises from the behavior of his or her community. The involvement of an active community will affect the behavior of its members (Mac Naughton, 2005). This is because a family living in a community is a social group that will work together to develop their institution through social activities (Kwok & Harris, 2012). The lack of inclusion within a community will hamper the dissemination of information regarding educational activities to parents. In Ting's (2005) study, it was found that rural parents paid less attention to their children's education and this affected their children's behavior. Berger and Brexton (1998) are in agreement over this matter and state that to reduce this problem, various models can be built to help improve learning for those who behind in their studies. Therefore, parents and family members play an important role in shaping the behaviour of their children

especially with regard to the improvement of academic performance. Thus, it is clear social inclusion from the community is important in improving the education of the rural society. Once the cultural need for inclusion is absorbed into the community, it will influence its members to be more involved in the social activities. This means that the dispersal of information will be more consistent and information will be channeled successfully.

### ***Within-community approach***

Various efforts by the government to strengthen education has been carried out. The top to bottom approach would imply that aid from the government goes to the community while the bottom-up approach is the involvement of the community in programs conducted by the government that is meant to serve as strengthening activities. This is because the strengthening should not only occur among the community (subordinates) but from the higher-ups (Ife, 1995). There are two parts to these strengthening activities as suggested by Ife 1995 – power refers to the agency that has the ability to develop a community such as the government, non-governmental organisations, politicians, and weaker groups such as communities in dire need of development from all aspects.

### ***The Bottom-Up approach***

However, the aforementioned strengthening activities need to emphasize the subordinates such as the community. This is because strengthening here refers to the ability of a person viewed as part of a vulnerable group. It is well known that the weakest group in the development of the community is the members of the community itself. This vulnerable group needs the strength and ability to break free from the downturn. This is because the method of obtaining information from the rural community remains insufficient. This requires the best approach within a community. Most respondents are not educated in obtaining their own information independently without the help of others. Most information about the program is dispersed via the 'top down' approach, originating from schools that represent the ministry or placeholders for the parents in representing the community. However, parents are unable to act independently in obtaining information through their own efforts to obtain information on programs run by the government. They must also be self-reliant in accessing resources provided by the government to improve their livelihood.

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In this study, it is seen that social inclusion, which is the involvement of the local community, is a necessity in any particular community, especially the one in Baling. With the availability of social inclusion or community involvement, stakeholders (executives) are in much better shape to communicate details regarding relevant programs to parents. This not only enables an effective channel for delivery of information, parents can provide feedback to stakeholders quickly. Any misunderstandings that parents may have on the programs can be cleared up clearly and swiftly. It also helps parents understand the purpose of the activities and programs carried out through local community involvement or social inclusion. With community involvement, the relationship between the executives and the parents will grow closer. More transparent face-to-face discussions are possible. In addition to social inclusion, the right approach or method should also be applied to the parents. The "top-down" approach, which involves the channel from the executive to the parents, is based upon the concept of delivering information on educational programs is a common approach used in the Baling district. This shows that information flow regarding school activities is one-sided. The "bottom up" approach is a necessity for the Baling community. In this study, the "bottom-up" approach shows that parents need to be aware of the programs being run in schools. This is because development through communication on a bottom-up basis requires the participation of the community itself in order to cooperate with the higher-ups (Waisbord, 2008). This will reduce the dependency of parents who only await or receive instructions or information from the stakeholders. Instead, parents should try to get the information from the stakeholders. This effort will be assisted by the members of community involved in this delivery system issue. This is because such activities are based on the bottom-up approach, which empowers the

community in its pursuit of a better quality of life (Nurdin, 2000) through the efforts of the government. The local community will be the mediator between the parents and the executives. With these two approaches (top- down, bottom-up), the delivery system of the program information implemented in schools are much effective. The information that stakeholders want to pass on to parents is much smoother. If this bottom-up approach is not undertaken, in other words, should there be no participation in programs or interventions carried out by the government, this will affect the community development process. This is especially important in a community that wants a more conducive lifestyle change.

## CONCLUSION

It turns out that social inclusion from the community and the right approach or method are the main needs of parents in the Baling district to get information on educational programs being conducted. However, cooperation from both parties is essential to realise the needs of the Baling community in this issue of the education delivery system.

Collaboration from local communities such as community-based organizations (OBK) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) is a key weapon in helping to improve this information flow. It should be further emphasized by the 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' approaches as an effort to empower the Baling community. If this social inclusion of OBKs and NGOs is created through a community-based approach based on the 'top- down' and 'bottom-up' practices, then the program information provided by the school will be passed on to parents at greater ease. The delivery of this information can also be seen from the parents' feedback to the school. In this way, short-term barriers, high costs of access to technology, high financial use, lack of motivation in education and resource scarcity can be resolved.

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