

ORIGINAL ARTICLE



ENHANCING INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE EDUCATION: EVALUATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF KADAZANDUSUN LANGUAGE TEACHING METHODS AMONG PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS IN SABAH

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Abstract

This study aimed to examine the effectiveness of Kadazandusun language teaching and learning methods employed by primary school teachers specializing in the instruction of the Kadazandusun language. The research focused on the implementation of systematic pedagogical approaches that incorporate a variety of instructional techniques and strategies to enhance the teaching and learning process. Specifically, the study investigated the application of teaching methods such as dialogue-based activities, role-playing, drilling, singing, demonstrations, and educational games in facilitating language acquisition and learner engagement. A total of 20 Kadazandusun language teachers from primary schools across the Tambunan District, Sabah, participated in the study. A quantitative research approach employing a descriptive survey design was adopted to obtain insights into teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of these instructional methods. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire comprising 30 items and subsequently analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23.0. Descriptive statistical analyses, including mean scores and standard deviations, were utilized to interpret the data. The findings revealed that the overall level of acceptance and perceived effectiveness of the teaching methods was positive, with an overall mean score of 3.05. This result suggests that the instructional approaches employed by the teachers were generally effective in supporting the teaching and learning of the Kadazandusun language. Nevertheless, the findings also indicate the need for greater integration of learner-centered instructional models and the more effective utilization of teaching resources and educational materials. Such enhancements may contribute to improved classroom management practices, increased effectiveness of teaching and learning activities, and a reduction in teachers' instructional workload. Based on these findings, several recommendations are proposed to strengthen pedagogical practices and further improve the quality of Kadazandusun language education in primary schools.

Keywords: Method, Technique, Strategies, Teaching and Learning and Kadazandusun.

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Introduction

The transformation of contemporary education from a predominantly traditional curriculum toward more learner-centered and competency-based models has substantially influenced the selection and implementation of teaching approaches, strategies, methods, and techniques among educators. Despite these developments, questions remain regarding the extent to which particular instructional approaches effectively enhance students' achievement, engagement, and learning behavior across different subjects. These concerns are further complicated by variations in students' cognitive abilities, interests, attitudes, and learning preferences, which may affect their motivation and participation in classroom activities. Such diversity presents challenges for teachers in designing instruction that is both inclusive and effective.

Within the Malaysian educational context, particularly in Sabah, the Kadazandusun language serves important educational and sociocultural functions. The subject is intended not only to develop students' communicative competence, but also to foster positive values, cultural appreciation, national identity, and the preservation of Kadazandusun heritage (Norjietta Taisin, 2012). Consequently, teachers' pedagogical knowledge and instructional practices are likely to influence students' learning experiences and patterns of engagement in Kadazandusun language education. The selection of appropriate teaching methods is therefore a critical responsibility of teachers. Effective instructional design requires careful planning of classroom activities, thoughtful adaptation of teaching materials, and sound classroom management practices (Solis, 2009). A well-structured pedagogical approach can stimulate learners' interest and support more meaningful learning outcomes. Recent studies further suggest that effective language teaching increasingly depends on the integration of learner-centred pedagogies supported by digital technologies. Educational resources that combine interactive multimedia, usability, and active learning have been shown to improve learner engagement, motivation, and overall learning outcomes (Revythi & Tselios, 2019; Resmanti et al., 2024). These findings indicate that language teachers should employ instructional approaches that not only facilitate knowledge acquisition but also create meaningful and engaging learning experiences.

Although previous research has not focused specifically on Kadazandusun language instruction, studies on language teaching generally provide useful insights into the roles of approaches, methods, strategies, and techniques in supporting language learning. Building on this body of knowledge, the present study seeks to examine the effectiveness of the teaching and learning methods employed by primary school teachers who teach the Kadazandusun language. Research on Kadazandusun language education remains limited, resulting in insufficient empirical evidence to inform policy development and curriculum planning. This lack of research may hinder curriculum developers and education authorities from identifying instructional challenges faced by teachers and learners.

In many primary schools, teachers assigned to teach the Kadazandusun language are also responsible for other subjects such as Malay Language, English Language, Science, Mathematics,

and Visual Arts. Frequently, these teachers are selected because they belong to the Kadazandusun ethnic community rather than because they possess formal specialization in Kadazandusun language education. This situation may create constraints related to pedagogical content knowledge, instructional strategies, and classroom practices.

Comparable issues have been reported in studies of indigenous language education in other Malaysian contexts. For example, Magdeline anak Nor (2008) observed that many Iban language teachers in Sarawak secondary schools were not formally trained in the language, and their teaching practices were often influenced by their original academic disciplines (Ethnic Languages Unit, 2010). Such findings suggest that teachers' disciplinary backgrounds may shape their curriculum implementation and instructional decisions.

Effective teaching is widely recognized as involving the integration of multiple instructional elements, including strategies, approaches, methods, and techniques (Abdul Raof, 2008). Classroom techniques, as described by Azman Wan Chik (2007), are the observable actions teachers employ during instruction, such as the use of communicative tools, multimedia resources, or interactive activities. The purposeful use of diverse techniques can enhance student motivation and participation.

Contemporary pedagogical models also emphasize active learning approaches. Hussain Othman et al. (2008), for instance, highlighted the value of Problem-Based Learning (PBL) in developing students' problem-solving and collaborative skills. In PBL environments, students work in groups to address authentic problems while teachers function as facilitators who guide inquiry and learning. Such approaches encourage learners to construct knowledge actively rather than receive information passively.

Nevertheless, no single teaching method can be considered universally effective across all contexts, learners, and instructional objectives. Different methods produce different effects on students' learning experiences. Consequently, teachers need a repertoire of instructional approaches to prevent monotony, address diverse learner needs, and improve comprehension of lesson content. As noted by LN Thut and J.R. Gerberich (cited in Ishak Baba, 2009), mastery of only one instructional method does not equip teachers to respond adequately to the variety of challenges encountered in classroom practice. Limiting instruction to a narrow range of teaching techniques may reduce both the efficiency and effectiveness of knowledge delivery, potentially leading to decreased student engagement and less favorable learning outcomes. Therefore, understanding the effectiveness of current teaching practices in Kadazandusun language education is essential for improving instructional quality and supporting the long-term sustainability of indigenous language learning in Sabah.

Research Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative research design to examine the effectiveness of teaching and learning methods employed by primary school teachers in the instruction of the Kadazandusun language. A quantitative approach was considered appropriate as it facilitates the systematic collection and analysis of numerical data, enabling researchers to identify patterns, trends, and relationships related to educational practices and teacher perceptions. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire, which is widely recognized as an effective instrument for investigating attitudes, perceptions, and behavioural tendencies among respondents (Mohd. Najib, 2003).

The target population comprised primary school teachers responsible for teaching the Kadazandusun language in the Tambunan District of Sabah. The study sample was drawn from this population and included teachers actively involved in Kadazandusun language instruction. Data obtained through the questionnaire were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23.0. Descriptive statistical techniques, specifically mean scores and standard deviations, were employed to summarize and interpret the data. These statistical measures enabled the researchers to determine the level of effectiveness of the teaching and learning methods implemented by the respondents.

Questionnaires were administered directly by the researchers through visits to the participating schools. To facilitate data collection, the researchers collaborated with school administrators, including headmasters, senior assistants, and heads of the Kadazandusun language panels, who assisted in distributing the questionnaires to the respondents. This approach helped ensure a high response rate and enhanced the reliability of the collected data.

The study was conceptually underpinned by Behaviourist Learning Theory, which emphasizes observable behavioural changes as indicators of successful learning. Within the context of Kadazandusun language instruction, the application of instructional techniques such as simulations, drilling exercises, storytelling, role-playing, demonstrations, and other interactive activities reflects key principles of behaviourism. These teaching practices encourage repetition, reinforcement, and active participation, which contribute to the development of desired learning behaviours and language competencies among students. Therefore, the effectiveness of these instructional methods can be interpreted through the lens of behavioural learning outcomes.

To ensure the quality and consistency of the research instrument, a pilot study was conducted prior to the main data collection process. The questionnaire was developed by the researchers following an extensive review of relevant literature and previously validated instruments used in related educational studies. The reliability of the instrument was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, which measures the internal consistency of questionnaire items. The results of the pilot study indicated Cronbach's Alpha values ranging from 0.71 to 0.91 across the different constructs. These values exceed the minimum acceptable threshold for reliability and demonstrate satisfactory to excellent levels of internal consistency.

According to Mohd. Majid Konting (2000), a reliability coefficient of 0.60 or higher is generally considered acceptable for educational research. Therefore, the reliability coefficients obtained in this study confirm that the instrument was sufficiently robust and appropriate for investigating the effectiveness of Kadazandusun language teaching and learning methods among primary school teachers.

Results and Discussion

The findings concerning the effectiveness of Kadazandusun language teaching and learning methods among primary school teachers are presented in this section. The analysis revealed an overall mean score of 3.054, indicating a generally positive perception of the instructional methods employed in Kadazandusun language classrooms. Although the mean score exceeded the neutral benchmark of 3.00, it remained below the higher threshold of 3.50, suggesting that while the teaching methods were perceived as moderately effective, there is still considerable room for pedagogical enhancement and innovation.

The positive overall mean score reflects teachers' acceptance of the instructional approaches currently utilized in Kadazandusun language education. Conversely, mean scores below 3.00 would indicate less favorable perceptions and potential concerns regarding instructional effectiveness. The present findings underscore the importance of continuously refining teaching practices to align with contemporary educational demands and learner-centered pedagogical principles.

The results support the view that effective teaching methods play a critical role in facilitating meaningful learning experiences. According to Ee Ah Meng (1994), teaching methods consist of systematic and organized instructional actions designed to achieve specific learning objectives within a lesson. Effective methods provide a structured framework that guides the teaching and learning process, enabling teachers to deliver content in a coherent and purposeful manner. Consequently, the selection of appropriate instructional methods is essential for promoting student engagement and enhancing learning outcomes.

A closer examination of Item 1 revealed a mean score of **3.12**, indicating that respondents generally agreed that students demonstrate better understanding of lesson content when the drilling technique is incorporated into classroom instruction. The drilling method emphasizes repetition and reinforcement, allowing learners to repeatedly practice language forms, vocabulary, and pronunciation until mastery is achieved. This approach is particularly beneficial for students who require additional support in developing foundational language skills.

The effectiveness of the drilling technique observed in this study is consistent with previous research findings. For example, Zainora Mohd Man (2005), in a study examining Malay language instruction at SK Perian, Pahang, reported that students initially experienced difficulties in reading and performing well in examinations due to weak literacy skills. Six Year Five students participated in the intervention, and pre-test results indicated that they were unable to accurately read a substantial number of target words. Following a structured drilling intervention, post-test assessments demonstrated significant improvement, with approximately 91.6% of the target words successfully mastered by the participants. These findings suggest that repeated practice through drilling can substantially improve learners' language proficiency and academic performance.

The current findings further reinforce the pedagogical value of drilling as an instructional technique in language education. Through repeated exposure and practice, learners are able to strengthen their comprehension, retention, and application of linguistic knowledge. Therefore, the integration of drilling activities within Kadazandusun language instruction may contribute positively to students' language acquisition and overall learning achievement. Nevertheless, while drilling remains an effective strategy for reinforcing learning, it should be complemented by other interactive and learner-centered approaches to ensure a balanced and engaging instructional environment that addresses diverse learner needs.

Table 1

Mean and Standard Deviation of Teachers' Use of Teaching Techniques

Item	Statement Item	Mean	Standard Deviation	Level
1	I use the drilling technique in order for my students to further understand the contents based on the suitability of learning objectives.	3.12	0.656	High
2	I use the story-telling technique (involving cognitive, affective and psychomotor) because it facilitates the delivery of lessons.	3.13	0.664	High
3.	I apply the language game techniques in my teaching to attract students' attention.	3.16	0.678	High
4	I apply the teaching methods based on objectives with teaching steps (set induction, implementation and conclusion).	3.00	0.753	High
5	I am prepared to use approaches such as behaviourism, cognitive, constructivism, and others in my teaching and learning sessions.	2.98	0.647	High
6	I use the demonstration technique in every lesson to retain students' attention.	2.95	0.751	High
7	I use student, teacher, and material centred strategies to achieve my teaching objectives.	3.06	0.604	High
8	I am able to manage my class using various teaching methods.	3.08	0.730	High
9	I am able to attract students' attention by applying various traditional methods in teaching.	3.05	0.675	High
10	I am able to convince my students through the application of various teaching methods for behavioural changes (learning).	3.02	0.770	High
	Average	3.054	0.491	High

Discussion

The findings of the present study are further supported by the work of the Malay Language Panel of SRJK (Tamil) Gadong, Tanjung Sepat (2008), which demonstrated the effectiveness of drilling techniques in enhancing students' reading proficiency in the Malay language. The study involved twelve primary school students and aimed to improve existing instructional practices for teaching syllable recognition through a more structured and systematic approach. The results indicated a notable improvement in students' academic performance, with the pass rate increasing by approximately 10% compared to previous assessments. These findings provide empirical support for the pedagogical value of repetitive practice in language learning and reinforce the role of drilling as an effective instructional strategy for strengthening foundational literacy skills.

From a theoretical perspective, the effectiveness of drilling techniques can be explained through Behaviourist Learning Theory, which posits that learning occurs through repeated stimulus-response interactions reinforced by practice and feedback. According to this perspective, repeated exposure to language structures and continuous practice contribute to the development of desired learning behaviours and facilitate knowledge retention. However, repetitive activities should be implemented meaningfully and strategically to prevent learner disengagement and boredom. Teachers can enhance the effectiveness of reinforcement-based learning by incorporating diverse instructional materials, multimedia resources, and language-learning facilities that support active student participation.

The behavioural learning process can be conceptualized as a sequence of reinforcement, learning, and behavioural change, whereby consistent practice leads to the acquisition of new knowledge and skills, ultimately resulting in observable improvements in learner performance (Kamarudin Hj. Husin, 2008). Consequently, the findings suggest that Kadazandusun language teachers have made considerable efforts to integrate various pedagogical approaches, strategies, methods, and techniques into their classroom instruction. Nevertheless, several challenges continue to influence instructional effectiveness, including differences in students' language proficiency levels, varying learning abilities, and limitations in teachers' pedagogical preparation and instructional planning.

The overall findings indicate that the effectiveness of Kadazandusun language teaching and learning methods is generally high. The instructional approaches employed by teachers appear to support students' mastery of essential language competencies, including grammar, sentence construction, essay writing, and oral communication skills. Furthermore, teachers' ability to utilize a range of pedagogical approaches, strategies, methods, and techniques contributes positively to student learning outcomes and classroom engagement.

Teacher creativity also emerged as a significant factor in promoting effective learning. The use of diverse and engaging instructional activities was found to stimulate students' interest, increase motivation, and encourage positive behavioural changes. These findings are consistent with contemporary educational theories that emphasize active learning, student engagement, and learner-centered instruction as critical components of successful language education.

Despite the positive findings, reliance on a limited range of instructional methods may restrict opportunities for deeper learning and skill development. Therefore, teachers should adopt a more balanced pedagogical approach that combines drilling, storytelling, language games, demonstrations, collaborative learning activities, and communicative language teaching strategies. In particular, demonstration-based instruction and guided practice activities can provide students with meaningful opportunities to develop language proficiency through authentic language use and continuous feedback.

In addition, the integration of authentic teaching and learning materials should be prioritized to enhance the relevance and effectiveness of language instruction. Resources such as newspaper articles, audiovisual materials, digital media, graphic organizers, and culturally relevant texts can enrich the learning experience and promote contextualized language acquisition. Furthermore, learning activities conducted outside the classroom environment should be incorporated into Kadazandusun language programs to provide students with authentic opportunities to practice language skills in real-life settings.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings of this study highlight the importance of strengthening teacher capacity and instructional support in Kadazandusun language education. Given the shortage of professionally trained Kadazandusun language teachers, many schools assign teachers from other subject specializations, such as Moral Education, Music, Science, or Mathematics, to teach the language. While these teachers may possess linguistic competence, they may not always have adequate pedagogical training in indigenous language education. Consequently, continuous professional development programs and in-service training initiatives should be implemented to enhance teachers' pedagogical knowledge, instructional skills, and curriculum understanding.

School administrators also play a crucial role in improving the quality of Kadazandusun language instruction. Educational leaders should encourage and support teachers in integrating digital technologies and innovative teaching tools into classroom practice. The incorporation of multimedia resources, educational software, interactive applications, and digital learning platforms can enhance student engagement and facilitate more effective language learning experiences. Such initiatives are consistent with the demands of twenty-first-century education and the increasing emphasis on technology-enhanced learning.

At the policy level, the Ministry of Education should continue to strengthen the development and implementation of the Kadazandusun language curriculum. Curriculum developers and syllabus designers should ensure that key linguistic components, particularly morphology and language structure, are introduced systematically from the early stages of education and progressively developed throughout primary and secondary schooling. Furthermore, instructional modules and learning materials should be designed to provide continuity across educational levels while remaining developmentally appropriate and culturally relevant for learners.

The Ministry should also incorporate educational technology competencies into teacher education and professional development programs. Equipping teachers with digital pedagogical skills will enable them to respond effectively to contemporary educational challenges and create more engaging and inclusive learning environments.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future studies should further investigate several dimensions of Kadazandusun language education, including:

1. The effectiveness of different learning theories and pedagogical models in Kadazandusun language instruction.
2. Comparative analyses of teacher-centered, student-centered, and material-centered instructional approaches in Kadazandusun language classrooms.
3. The influence of classroom management practices on the effectiveness of Kadazandusun language teaching and learning.
4. The impact of instructional resources, teaching materials, and educational technologies on students' language acquisition and academic achievement.
5. The effectiveness of digital learning environments, e-modules, and technology-enhanced pedagogies in promoting Kadazandusun language proficiency.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on indigenous language education by providing empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of instructional practices in Kadazandusun language teaching. The findings demonstrate that the strategic integration of diverse teaching methods, supported by effective classroom management and appropriate instructional resources, can enhance language learning outcomes and support the preservation of indigenous linguistic heritage. Such efforts are essential for preparing students to meet the demands of an increasingly globalized world while maintaining their cultural identity and linguistic heritage. Ultimately, Kadazandusun language education should align with broader national educational aspirations of developing well-rounded, resilient, innovative, and socially responsible learners equipped with critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and lifelong learning skills.

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