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Conceptualising a Framework for Language and Cultural Revival Based on The Bidayuh Community in Sarawak, Malaysia

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Abstract

The Bidayuhs, an indigenous community in Sarawak, Malaysia, are experiencing heavy language shift. Many young Bidayuhs, who have moved to bigger cities for higher education and better job opportunities, have shifted to speak dominant languages. This situation has resulted in the Bidayuh language being spoken less. Parents in mixed marriages have also chosen those languages as their family language, abandoning the transmission of Bidayuh to their children. Furthermore, Bidayuh does not have a standardised orthography due to its high diversity. All these factors result in it becoming threatened. Various methodological practices have been taken for revitalisation purposes. This study compiles and categorises them according to three levels: (i) schools, (ii) community, and (iii) society. The practices include the development of a unified orthography for vowels, the establishment of Bidayuh medium preschools, the formation of a Bidayuh music band that uses traditional musical instruments, and film documentary and mural painting of the last ring ladies from the *Bi'embhan* subethnic group. By conceptualising a framework based on these practices, this study hopes to inspire global communities to prioritise language and cultural revival for the mental and physical wellbeing of those involved.

Keywords: *language and cultural revival, methodological practices, revivalistics, Bidayuh, Sarawak*

Introduction

Located in Southeast Asia, Malaysia has a population of 32.78 million inhabitants (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2021a), comprising *Bumiputras*, Chinese, Indians, and many indigenous and other ethnic communities. The states of Sabah and Sarawak exhibit complex multilingualism. Eberhard et al. (2024) state that out of the 111 living languages in Malaysia, 93 are endangered, while two are extinct. Most of these threatened languages are indigenous to Sabah and Sarawak and need documentation before they disappear.

The Bidayuh community, indigenous to Sarawak, speaks the Bidayuh language. They account for 7.81% of Sarawak's population (2.82 million) and 0.67% of Malaysia's national population (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2021b). Using the Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS) by Lewis and Simons (2010), Coluzzi et al. (2018) propose that within the Bidayuh Belt, the language is 6a – Vigorous[1], while outside it is 7 – Shifting. These levels indicate a fast-paced language shift.

Past studies (Kayad & Ting, 2021; Norahim, 2010; Riget & Wang, 2016; Ting et al., in press) show many young Bidayuhs in urban areas are shifting to dominant languages such as Standard Malay, Sarawak

[1] Vigorous – the language is used for face-to-face communication within all generations, and the situation is sustainable.

Malay, English, and Iban. These languages are supported in the national education system, while Bidayuh is not (Ting & Berek, 2021). Additionally, Bidayuh has no significant role in state media (Riget & Campbell, 2020). Although 55% of 467 Bidayuhs surveyed expressed love for their language, only 1.5% found it useful for employment and 0.9% for formal education (Ting et al., in press). Mixed marriages also contribute to this shift, as Bidayuh is not the primary language choice in these families (Ting & Campbell, 2017; Norahim, 2017). Consistent exposure to an ethnic language at home is crucial for language transmission (Gibbons & Ramirez, 2004).

This study aims to conceptualize a practical framework for language and cultural revival using the Bidayuh community as an exemplar. As Zuckermann (2020, p. xxiii) states, “Language revival will become increasingly relevant as people seek to recover their cultural autonomy, empower their spiritual and intellectual sovereignty, and improve their wellbeing.” The framework compiles various "bottom-up community-led but expert-supported" methodological practices (Lo Bianco, 2020, p. 86). These practices are organic, motivated by "local needs and desires, and shaped by local resources and opportunity structures" (McCarty, 2018, p. 24). They serve to reinforce intergenerational ties, cultural identity, community wellbeing, and linguistic rights (McCarty, 2018, p. 25).

The compilation process of the various practices is grounded by the theory of revivalistics, proposed by Zuckermann (2020), which refers to a transdisciplinary field of comparative and systematic inquiry surrounding language reclamation (of a no-longer spoken language), revitalisation (of a severely endangered language), and reinvigoration (of an endangered language that still has a high percentage of children speaking it). In revivalistics, language speakers are placed at the centre instead of the language. Those involved in revivalistics need “not [be] only a linguist but also a teacher, driver, schlepper, financial manager, cook, waiter, psychologist, social worker, babysitter, donor, [and], etc.” (Zuckermann, 2020, p. 207). They ought to work with the community in which their work involves much more than sitting in the laboratory to analyse a morpheme and phoneme. Most importantly, the “language revivalist must have a heart of gold, ‘balls’ of steel and the patience of a saint” (Zuckermann, 2020, p. 207). Losing a language during language shift process threatens knowledge of the environment (Brenzinger et al., 1994) and conceptual diversity (Brenzinger, 2006, 2007, 2018). Therefore, Zuckermann (2020) urges revivalistics for three reasons: (i) ethical (it is the right for every person to use their ethnic language), (ii) aesthetic (language represents a way for expressing ideas, beliefs, and cultural practices), and (iii) utilitarian (language revival is beneficial for the improvement of the mental and physical wellbeing of the community’s speakers and those involved).

The following section provides a brief introduction of Bidayuh. We then followed by compiling various methodological practices categorised into three levels: (i) school, (ii) community, and (iii) society. Some related successful and unsuccessful stories are subsequently discussed, and the study ends with a conclusion.

The Bidayuh Language

Formerly known as the Land Dayak, which carries the meaning of 'the Dayak of the hill country' (Brooke, 1841), the Bidayuh community belongs to a subgroup of the western Malayo-Polynesian branch of the Austronesian language family (Adelaar, 2005). Today, they are better known as the Dayak Bidayuhs or Bidayuhs only. About 90% of the Bidayuhs live in the western end of Sarawak (Rensch et al., 2012), also known as the Bidayuh Belt (Dundon, 1989) that is made up of three districts in Kuching Division (Lundu, Bau, and Kuching) and one district in Samarahan Division (Serian). The remaining 10%, mostly the younger generation, have moved to Kuching, the capital city of Sarawak, or other parts of Malaysia due to mixed marriages, higher education, or better job opportunities.

The Bidayuhs speak Bidayuh, a broad term used to represent the four main dialects and 29 subdialects; none are mutually intelligible as they demonstrate clear pronunciation, lexical, and semantic differences (Dealwis & David, 2007). Dundon (1989) explains that a form in one dialect may mean a different thing in another dialect. According to Ting et al. (in press), the four main dialects spoken in the Bidayuh belt are Salako Rara (Lundu district – 10,700 speakers), Bau/Bau-Jagoi (Bau district – 29,000 speakers), Biatah (Kuching district – 63,900 speakers), and Serian (also known as Bukar-Sadong) (Serian district – 49,100 speakers). These figures were obtained from the 2000 census (Lewis et al., 2013), and therefore, the number of speakers at present may have differed as there are no up-to-date statistics. The Rara dialect, which is mainly spoken in Kampung Pasir Tengah of the westernmost part of the Lundu district, is sometimes classified as the fifth variety that is distinct from the Salako dialect. The Bau-Jagoi dialect is further categorised into subdialects, such as Bisinghai, Biroh, and Krokong. In contrast, for the Biatah dialect, the subdialects are Penyua, Binah, Bipuruh, Tebia, and Bebengo (Dealwis & David, 2007). Some Bidayuhs who reside in the upper areas of the Sadong River speak a different dialect from those living in the lower areas. Such complexity has led Crystal (1987) to describe the Bidayuh community as a highly diverse language group. Table 1 summarises the different Bidayuh dialects, as identified in Bonggara et al.'s (2017) study.

Table 1: *Summary of six main Bidayuh dialects (Source: Bonggara et al., 2017, p. 217)*

Dialects	Subdialects	Districts
Salako	-	Lundu
Rara	-	Lundu
Bau	Jagoi, Singai, Serebu, Bratak, Gumbang	Bau, Lundu, Padawan
Biatah	Baatar, Bibenuk, Bipuruh, Bistaang, Disapug, Pinyawa', Biya	Penrissen, Padawan

Serian (Bukar-Sadong)	Bukar, Sadong, Tebakang, Sadong Bunan, Sangking, Mentu Tapuh	Serian
Tringgus/Sembaan	Sembaan, Tringgus Raya, Tringgus Bireng	Bau, Penrissen, Padawan

Collecting and Categorising Data

For data collection, the various methodological practices were compiled via different sources: past studies, websites, online news, Instagram posts, and casual conversation with musicians, a documentary director, and a mural artist. After completion, we categorised the practices according to three levels: (i) school, (ii) community, and (iii) society. The justification for such categorisation is that as the language and cultural revival of each community has its own goals, procedures, and programmes it should be made holistically, meaning that it should encompass both small and big domains. Hence, the small domain in the Bidayuh community case is the preschools/kindergartens where children begin to learn Bidayuh in their early childhood years and progress into formal education. When these children can speak the language fluently, they can communicate with the community and apply it in various industries. Lastly, the broader society, including the non-Bidayuhs, gets involved with more activities related to reviving Bidayuh and its culture.

Methodological Practices for Bidayuh Language and Cultural Revival

The various practices that have been compiled are put together as shown in Figure 1:

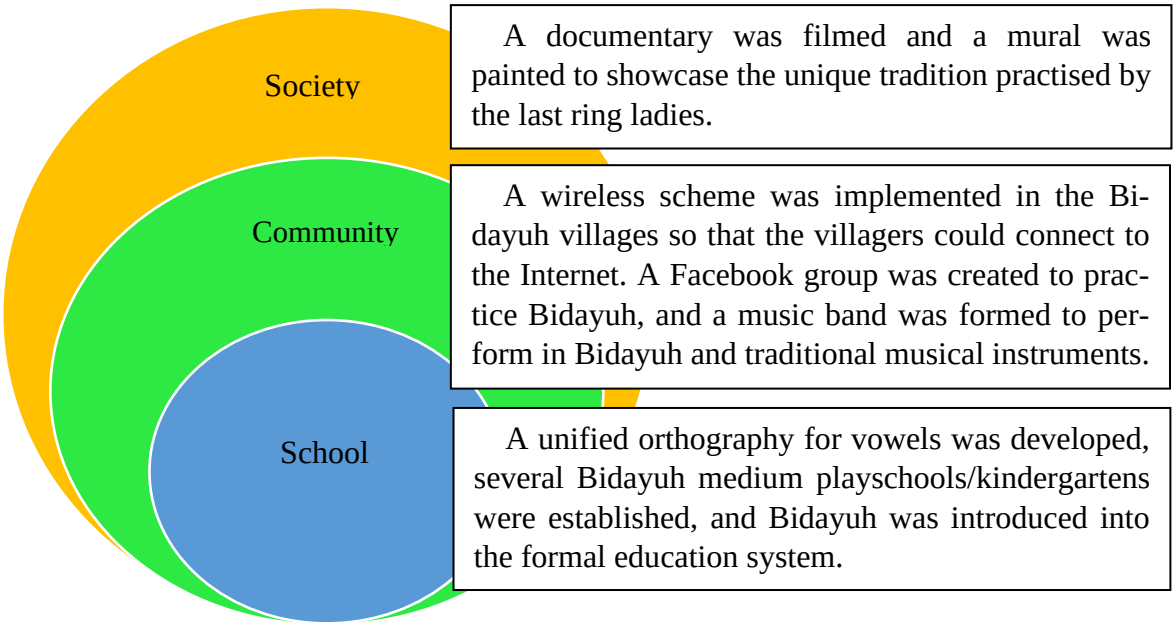

Figure 1: Conceptualising a framework for language and cultural revival based on the Bidayuh community

School Level

As discussed earlier, Bidayuh has four main dialects and 29 sub-dialects, of which none are mutually intelligible. Additionally, these dialects are defined by geographical and village boundaries. Due to its complexity, it does not have a standardised orthography. Hence, in 2001, the Dayak Bidayuh National Association (DBNA) initiated a project known as the *Bidayuh Language Development Preservation* (BLDP), with assistance from the Summer Institute of Linguistics Malaysia (SIL) and UNESCO in Bangkok, Thailand (Riget & Campbell, 2020). Following BLDP, they piloted the *Multilingual Education* (MLE) project in 2006 and the *Ethnic Language Curriculum* (ELC) project in 2018.

In January 2001, BLDP commenced after permission was granted by the Sarawak State Planning Unit. Its main aim was to assist in preserving and promoting Bidayuh among the Bidayuh community. To ensure the achievement of the main aim, four sub-aims were established (Noeb & Ridu, 2017, p. 29):

a) to revitalise the language, especially forgotten and neglected terms;
b) to develop a unified orthography for the four main Bidayuh dialects;
c) to expand the body of Bidayuh literature; and
d) to facilitate the teaching of Bidayuh as a subject in national schools.

Several small projects have been developed between DBNA and SIL in pursuit of BDLP's aims. These projects involved data collection and documentation of Bidayuh with considerable inputs in the fields of phonology, morphology, and semantics. One of the most significant achievements of the projects was the establishment of a unified orthography for vowels in August 2003, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Orthography for Bidayuh vowels (Source: Noeb & Ridu, 2017)

Pronunciation	**Current Spelling**			**Unified Spelling**	
	Bau	**Biatah**	**Serian**	**Proposed**	**Decided**
[ɑ]	a	a	a	a	a
[ə] / [ʌ]	-	a	a	e	e
[iə] / [ɛ]	ie	e	e	é	é
[i]	i	i	i	i	i
[uə] / [ə]	uo	o	o	o	o
[ɔ] / [ɯ]	o	ū	u (ū / û)	Ø (ū / û)	ū
[u]	u	u	u	u	u

In addition, several workshops were organised to progress the achievement of BLDP, which includes the *Learning that LASTS* (LtL) workshops that set out to recruit and train Bidayuhs to write, compile, publish, and distribute materials using Bidayuh. A *Curriculum Development Seminar* was also organised to de-

velop the curriculum and teaching/learning materials for the introduction of Bidayuh in schools. In 2003, dictionary-making workshops were conducted to compile records of Bidayuh's vocabulary, particularly words that need to be addressed or remembered. The outcome of the dictionary-making workshops was the publication of picture dictionaries and wordlists for the four main dialects that are now used as references.

In 2006, DBNA signed a contract with UNESCO to pilot the MLE project with assistance from SIL. The project aimed to provide the Bidayuh children with a firm foundation for learning their ethnic language (Bidayuh), which was also considered as a first language, and gradually introducing the second and third languages (Standard Malay and English). MLE is briefly defined as the use of two or more languages as a medium of instruction in schools (Joyik et al., n.d.). In MLE, the children's first language is initially taught and continues to be maintained while bridges are built with the subsequent introduction of other languages. According to Noeb and Ridu (2017, pp. 38-39), the aim of MLE was:

> "to empower children in minority language communities to learn well in the language of wider communication without having to sacrifice their own language and culture. The Bidayuh MLE programme puts an emphasis on the Bidayuh cultural heritage through stories, songs, dances, arts and crafts, and teaching on culturally important topics. Where possible, members of the older generation come to the classroom to teach music, dance, and crafts."

In other words, MLE helps children to build cognitive skills through their ethnic language and cultural concepts, which is considered as their safety net. Once they are confident with their literacy skills in that language, they can gradually build proficiency in the second and third languages, which will be beneficial in their later stage of life.

In 2007, the MLE project began in seven playschools for children aged three and four in selected villages in the Bau, Serian, Kuching/Penrissen, and Lundu districts (Riget & Campbell, 2020). The curriculum is purely conducted using Bidayuh. As Bidayuh consists of four main dialects, the dialect used for teaching in each district differs. In 2009, five MLE kindergartens were launched in the same villages for children aged five and six (Riget & Campbell, 2020). For aged five, all subjects are taught in Bidayuh, while Standard Malay is introduced orally through games and activities. For ages six, the curriculum remains in the developing stage, where English begins its introduction to the children orally, similar to Standard Malay. In 2010, three more play schools were introduced in other villages (Riget & Campbell, 2020). The philosophy behind the MLE project is that when these Bidayuh children acquire skills and knowledge in their ethnic language (Bidayuh), they will develop confidence and have better interaction skills with their friends and teachers. Their ability to engage in learning while retaining their cultural identity and heritage will lead to better performance when they begin formal education. According to Joyik et al. (2017, p. 73), MLE is therefore seen as a platform to deliver a strong foundation for the Bidayuh children and "a head start in their education by starting education in their mother tongue, then gradually introducing Bahasa Malaysia (Standard

Malay) and English." Table 3 shows a summary of the playschools and kindergartens located in different districts.

Table 3: Bidayuh language playschools and kindergartens under the MLE project
(Source: Ting & Campbell, 2013, p. 131)

Location	Variety of Bidayuh	Playschools (3-4 years old)	Kindergartens (5-6 years old)	Number of trained teachers
Pasir Hilir, Lundu	Rara	1 – 2007 establishment for 3-6 years old	None	1 (different teachers over the years)
Benuk	Biatah	1 – 2007 establishment for 4 years old	1 – 2009 establishment	2
Sinjok	Biatah	1 – 2010 establishment	1 – 2012 establishment	2
Apar	Bau-Singai	1 – 2007 establishment	1 – 2009 establishment, closed in 2016	2 (1 left)
Kampung Serasot, Bau	Bau	1 – 2016 establishment	None	1
Kampung Bogag, Bau	Bau	1 – 2016 establishment	None	1
Gahat Mawang, Serian	Serian	1 – 2016 establishment	None	1
Buna Gega, Serian	Serian	1 – 2016 establishment	None	1

In 2018, an ELC pilot study was conducted by introducing Bidayuh into the formal education system while assisting other indigenous communities to employ their ethnic language as a medium of instruction (Riget & Campbell, 2020). Six primary schools in the Bau, Kuching/Penrissen, and Serian districts participated in the study. The ELC is a "curriculum designed as a template for using any ethnic language for learning, critical thinking, and communication in the formal classroom setting" (Kayad & Arritt, 2017, p. 91). The main objective of forming ELC is to maintain cultural identity, assist children in literacy, expand the use of ethnic language in various domains, and employ it as a subject to be taught in the education system (Bonggara & Siam, 2017, p. 91). To achieve the objective, ELC is linked to the curriculum of MLE and taught using the teaching approach of the government's standard curriculum. At the time of writing, ELC has developed a curriculum and teaching/learning materials for the Primary One language class in three

main dialects: (i) Bau, (ii) Biatah, and (iii) Serian. Continuous efforts have been made for the other levels of language classes.

Community Level

Because Bidayuh is currently learned and spoken less and less, the Bidayuh community is very concerned about maintaining their ethnic language and connections with their ancestral home villages (Mclellan & Jones, 2015). Some community members have become strong activists, championing the Bidayuh language maintenance and revitaliSation. The *Kampung Tanpa Wayar* (wireless/Wi-Fi village) scheme was introduced in the Bidayuh Belt to provide internet access to underserved areas so that the urban-rural digital divide would be reduced (Mclellan & Jones, 2015). With such efforts, the Bidayuh community was able to use online technology for language revival. A Facebook (private) group, *Sinda Dayak Bidayuh Bau*, was created in October 2009 and currently has 19,400 members. In the introductory message, the group encouraged its community to use their language in the social media space as purely as possible. The translated message is as follows (Mclellan & Jones, 2015, p. 27):

> "The Bau Bidayuh language that we use is often mixed and combined with Malay and English. So let us try to use the Bidayuh as it is spoken in our villages. Let us share our knowledge and study the Bidayuh language in depth."

Interestingly, the message was written in Romanised characters, which demonstrates the usefulness of the unified orthography of vowels.

Concerning the use of Bidayuh for music, the *Suk Binie'* musical band was formed in 2014 with six members from the Bidayuh community. In the Bau dialect, *Suk Binie'* carries the meaning of young seedlings (*Suk* means shoot, *Binie'* means seed), which refers to the six young members who are passionate about bridging together traditional and contemporary music. The band created a logo (see Figure 2) for representation purposes – the shape is *S*, which signifies the shape of a leaf head falling inwards as it grows, similar to a paddy plant, carrying the literal meaning of being modest while growing with wisdom. The motif that is placed on the petal of the logo represents the *Pokuh* (fiddlehead fern) plant, an essential source of food for the Bidayuh community.

The six band members began their journey by doing performances in the Bau district. In 2017, they found success as champions at the Waterfront Music Festival in Kuching (Liza, 2017). Since then, the band has been invited to perform at many music festivals. The music played by the band is composed based on the traditions of indigenous communities in Sarawak, particularly the Bidayuhs, Ibans, and Orang Ulu. During performances, in traditional costumes, the band members sing in the Bau dialect and play traditional instruments, such as *kidibat* (traditional Bidayuh drum), *serubai* (flute), *gong* (percussion), *kulintang* (xylophone), and *sape* (lute) (see Figure 3). The leader wears *tawuop/tahup* (long loin-cloth wrapped around the

body with one end hanging down in front and the other at the back), *burang sumba* (headgear), and *kima* (armlets).

Figure 2: *Suk Binie' logo (Source: https://sukbinie.weebly.com/about.html)*

In contrast, the rest of the members wear the Bidayuh vest (sleeveless garment covering the upper body) with pendants made of the teeth of wild animals. The vest comes in black cloth with white and red strips, which are colours representing the Bidayuh community. Yellow is added to make the vest look more vibrant.

Figure 3: The music band of Suk Binie' (Source: https://sukbinie.weebly.com/)

Societal Level

The non-Bidayuhs made two types of practices related to a dying culture, intending to create awareness for the Bidayuh language and cultural revival among locals and tourists.

The ring ladies of the *Bi'embhan* subethnic group of the Bidayuh community are known as the living treasures of Sarawak because they are the last Bidayuh ladies carrying the tradition of *paad padi* (bringing home paddy from the field) while practising the ancient custom of wearing *ruyank'ng* and *rasunk'ng* on their forearms and calves (Into Borneo, n. d.). *Ruyank'ng* and *rasunk'ng* are coiled gold-coloured copper rings worn by these ladies to symbolise the distinctive culture of the *Bi'embhan* group. These rings were usually worn from a young age and became part of the ladies' daily dress. Other than for health reasons, these rings are never removed from daily activities, including fishing, cooking, and plucking fruits and vegetables. Some historians believe that such practice had its origin in the 11th century, in which its roots were related to cosmetic or protective grounds. Others stated that the practice occurred when the ring ladies' ancestor began selling goods obtained from the village to the Chinese traders, who arrived in Malaya (a past name for Malaysia) in the 15th century. The copper rings were used as payment.

In 2015, director Nova Goh from NG Pictures in Sabah filmed a documentary entitled *The Last Ring Ladies* (see Figure 4). In the past, the ladies and their families lived in Kampung Semban, Hulu Padawan. Kampung Semban is popularly known as 'the village above clouds' due to the beautiful scenery of the village located in the mountainous area. In 2010, when their ancestral village had to give way to the construction of the Bengoh Dam Reservoir, the ladies and their families were relocated to the Bengoh Resettlement Scheme (BRS). BRS is located in Kampung Semadang, 40km from the city centre, and has basic amenities such as water supply, 24-hours electricity, a church, a primary school, and four multipurpose halls. At the start of filming the documentary, six to eight ring ladies were living whose ages were between 69 and 94. However, at the time of writing this paper (2024), only three ladies remain. The filming took four years to complete because Goh's team had to rely on external funding won in film festivals (NG Pictures, 2020), such as Freedom Filmfest (2016) in Petaling Jaya, Malaysia; Crossing Borders (2016) in Seoul, South Korea; Leipzig Networking Day (2016) in Leipzig, Germany; and The Asian Pitch (2018) in Seoul, South Korea.

The documentary tells the story of how one of the ring ladies, Peluk Abeh, aged 70, struggles to adapt to the new environment in her modern home at the resettlement and longs for her vanishing ancestral home in Kampung Semban. In the village, there were many plantations, such as betel nuts, medicinal herbs, and paddy, and rivers were available for fishing. The new environment needs land for plantations, and thus, vegetables have to be bought from the market and not freshly harvested. Despite the struggles, Abeh and her husband agreed that the new environment is more convenient for visiting the clinic and hospital when they are unwell. The resettlement also allows local and international tourists to visit them for photography and to

learn about their unique culture. What is surprising is that Abeh's new life brought her the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to showcase her distinctive traditional costume to the world through its recreation to suit a contemporary bridal collection by renowned fashion designer Leng Lagenda. The photography session of Abeh in her unique traditional costume, harmonised by a model dressed in several contemporary bridal gowns, was conducted by specialist bridal photographer Kevin Then. The documentary completed filming in 2018 and was subsequently broadcast in 2019 on international broadcasting channels, such as Japan Broadcasting Corporation (NHK) in Japan, Korean Broadcasting System (KBS) in South Korea, and Taiwan Public Television Service Foundation (PTS) in Taiwan. It also premiered on TVS Sarawak on 7 November 2020.

Figure 4: The Last Ring Ladies, directed by Nova Goh (Source: https://intoborneo.com/the-last-ring-ladies/).

Following the documentary, in 2020, Sarawakian mural artist Leonard Siaw was commissioned to paint a mural of the remaining five ring ladies (see Figure 5). Entitled *Dayung Hmuai Semban*, which is translated as the beautiful ladies of Semban, the mural measures 13.7m x 36.5m. It is located on the wall of Kota Padawan Mall that faces the Kuching-Serian Road. Its location is strategic because Kota Padawan is the gateway to the Bidayuh longhouses and other Bidayuh-related touristic attractions. The Sarawak Minis-

try of Tourism, Arts, and Culture, Padawan Municipal Council (MPP), NG Picture, and Dian Kiara Sdn. Bhd. supported the mural project.

In the mural, Siaw captured the ring ladies in their traditional costume comprised of *bulang sebi* (headgear), *tumbih* (necklaces), *sumba* (earrings), *ruyank'ng* (copper ring on forearms), *kain ngumban* (red sash), *baju putang* (blouse), *sisink'ng* and *wi* (belts), and *jemuh sulam* (skirt/sarong). Two of the ladies were seen practicing their natural habit of chewing betel leaves, a tradition of thousands of years. The ladies were portrayed through a natural smile, which symbolises their simple lifestyle in the village. The mural also depicted betel nuts and leaves and the traditional baskets woven by the ladies that were used for harvesting in the field. Siaw painted the mural background blue, which resembles the colour of clouds in the sky and is interpreted as a representation of the ring ladies' ancestral home in Kampung Semban, 'the village above clouds.' The phrase 'the last ring ladies' was written in four languages – Standard Malay, English, Bidayuh, and Chinese – to inform those viewing the mural of who these ladies were. Siaw took 13 weeks (from 30 June 2020 to 30 September 2022) to complete the mural, and it was officially launched on 14 December 2020 in conjunction with the 24th anniversary celebration of MPP.

Figure 5: Dayang Hmuai Semban (from left to right: Nyukan Genyai, Peluk Abeh, Nyadi Dolah, Tawud Luhan, and Singai Nekan, drawn by Leonard Siaw (Source: https://www.facebook.com/siawtistic/)

Successful and Unsuccessful Stories

The listed methodological practices at all three levels were considered organic and systematically led by those Bidayuhs and non-Bidayuhs who were highly committed and supported by experts in the field. They involved hard work and time and were regarded as part and parcel of revivalistics. Most of the practices were considered successful because they provided positive perspectives in giving the Bidayuhs higher hopes for their language and cultural revival. For example, the concept employed by the *Suk Binie'* music band

was a way of expressing the cultural identity of the Bidayuh community. During the process of music composition and performances, the members developed an appreciation of and sense of connection with their language and cultural heritage. Singing in their ethnic language was emotional as it provided them with a strong sense of pride and identity.

When the documentary of the last ring ladies began filming, it received much attention globally. In 2016, the ladies were invited to perform at the Lo Spirito Del Pianeta in Milan, Italy (Bishop, 2020). Lo Spirito Del Pianeta was an international festival celebrating the diversity of indigenous communities. In 2019, the ladies were again invited to perform at the Internationale Tourismus-Borse in Berlin, Germany, the largest tourism festival in the world (Bishop, 2020). These invitations allowed the ring ladies to showcase their traditional dance and costume to other ethnic communities worldwide. When the mural was launched, one of the ring ladies, Singai Nekan, stated that she and the other ladies were proud to see their faces painted on the big wall and promised to continue wearing *ruyank'ng* and *rasunk'ng* for as long as they could (Jee, 2020). She also mentioned that they could not force their children and grandchildren to continue the tradition as they would not want to do so. On the positive end, Nekan's statement indicates the connection between psychological wellbeing and cultural strength. On the opposing end, "[such] lack of successful transmission can leave new generations feeling lost between cultures and creating an unstable sense of identity and the 'losing [of] one's soul'" (Wexler, 2006 in Zuckermann, 2020, p. 271). Adding to the sorrow was the inevitable events of the construction of the Bengoh Dam Reservoir that led the ring ladies to relocate, resulting in them losing their symbolic identity, culture, and traditional way of living (Goh's interview in Pilo, 2019). Therefore, the mural serves as a commemoration for appreciating this dying culture. In Siaw's (2020) words:

> "Certainty, this street art is not just about being 'instafamous', or another mural for aesthetic, but a monument of evidence for each and every one of us to witness the fall of this elegant way of life. It's been an honour to capture a piece of their life in colour, which is something I am forever grateful for. May the paintbrush that I held, honour this beautiful culture and serve a humble memorial of their legacy."

With the establishment of the Bidayuh medium playschools/kindergartens, those located in Benuk and Sinjok were considered successful (Riget & Campbell, 2020). Parents were supportive of sending their children there, and volunteers frequently gave a helping hand. Kayad and Ting (2021) found that the Bidayuh parents and teachers from the Kuching district (where Benuk and Sinjok were located) showed positive attitudes towards Bidayuh medium kindergartens because of the values of Bidayuh language and culture that the children would learn and maintain. In addition, Campbell et al. (2010) mentioned that learning Bidayuh would allow for more accessible communication between the Bidayuh children and their friends and older relatives in the village. In Kayad et al.'s (2022) study, the interviewed parents and teachers from Be-

nuk and Sinjok believed in the values of ethnic language education. Parents were willing to travel further and pay higher fees for their children to learn Bidayuh. One parent claimed that her daughter was a 'champion', overtaking over 100 students in another kindergarten after building a solid foundation in the Bidayuh medium playschool. These findings confirmed the widely accepted positive perception that ethnic language education benefits ethnic language and cultural transmission (Benson, 2004) and assists children in developing cultural fulfilment (Ball, 2011). In addition, the parent's claim supported McNamara et al. (2019)'s statement that ethnic language education enables children to acquire basic literacy, such as word recognition, phonics, and lexical decoding, before moving on to formal education. As Sudoh and Darr (2022) sums up, the maintenance of indigenous languages and cultural knowledge should be made via the employment of indigenous/ethnic languages in the education system so that children can develop their linguistic and cognitive skills in their ethnic language while engaging with their traditional culture.

However, not all practices were successful, mainly when many competitive factors were involved in the revival process. While those playschools in Benuk and Sinjok experienced success, others faced difficulties to the extent that some were closed down. The main factors contributing to the closing were low enrolments and poor community support. The lack of government funding also hindered these playschools from operating because educational facilities could not be upgraded, and teachers could not receive professional training. Moreover, as these schools depended on financial support from the community, the teachers' salary was relatively low.

Furthermore, some parents preferred to send their children to KEMAS (Community Development Department) playschools, which were run, funded, and recognized by the Malaysian Ministry of Rural Development. In Riget and Campbell's (2020) study, a Bidayuh representative stated that although the cost of transportation, food, and uniforms was provided as well as the Bidayuh medium playschools required no tuition fees, there were still many parents who did not believe in the playschools because the government did not recognise them. This situation led them to think twice before sending their children there. These findings aligned with Mclellan and Campbell's (2015) study, which also showed that some Bidayuh parents preferred the government-funded playschools due to the medium of instruction that used Standard Malay and English as these languages would benefit their children more in the future. The situation led to their children being not fluent in their ethnic language.

Conclusion

On 13 September 2007, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP) was adopted by the General Assembly with a majority vote of 143 states (United Nations, n.d.). Article 13(1) in the declaration states the following:

> "Indigenous people have the right to revitalise, use, develop, and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems, and literatures, and to designate and retain their own names for communities, places, and persons."

This statement shows the importance of language in representing the indigenous community's identity, culture, and way of living, which is demonstrated in the compilation of the various practices that have been taken so far to revive Bidayuh and its culture. Some of these practices have been faced with many challenges to the point that their community members have given up. Nevertheless, what should be remembered through the compilation process is that the use of any language, including the indigenous, exists beyond the classroom setting; it plays a significant role in social and cultural sustainability (Darr, 2022). Therefore, the encountered challenges should not hinder the "gradual and ongoing process" (Hinton et al., 2018, p. 500) of language and cultural revival because it may develop as time goes on with more extensive and more ambitious goals.

As demonstrated in the study, the *Suk Binie'* music band started with small performances and later became a champion in a music competition. Since then, the band has been invited to perform at big music festivals. Similarly, the ring ladies of the *Bi'embhan* subethnic group had never previously left their ancestral village. However, today, they shine in their golden age and have become the face of Sarawak Tourism via mural painting and film documentaries. Although the playschools and kindergartens faced challenges, supportive parents have continued to place their children in those schools to learn Bidayuh. The relationship between ethnic identity and holistic wellbeing should continue to be promoted so that more Bidayuh parents will develop a better understanding about learning Bidayuh, which helps to improve children's cultural identity and cognitive skills.

In closing, it is worth noting Hinton et al.'s (2018) and Zuckerman's (2020) statements concerning the process of language revival that does not place emphasis solely on the language. It is about many other things, such as knowledge of cultures, traditions, and practices; an understanding and care of the ancestral land; a sense of community togetherness and belonging; a robust ethnic identity of children growing up with; and the mental and wellbeing of every generation in the community. In simpler terms, language revival involves more than only language. It is also about cultural revival, as shown in this study. Additionally, the process is "multigenerational," involving different generations of community members, with no endpoint, and therefore, "the work is never done" (Hinton et al., 2018, p. 499). As linguist Ken Hale (The Economist, 2001) sums up, "When you lose a language, you lose a culture, intellectual wealth, a work of art. It's like dropping a bomb on a museum, the Louvre'."

Author contributions

Conceptualisation - S.B.S., T.O.W.S

Data collection - T.O.W.S

Data analysis - T.O.W.S, S.B.S

Drafting, writing, editing - S.B.S., T.O.W.S.

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Data availability statement

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Conflicts of interest

Both authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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