

# Investigating the Attributes of Chinese Primary School Adoption among the Malay Community in Malaysia

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## ABSTRACT

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*Around 100,000 non-Chinese students are studying in Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Cina (SJKC) schools every year in Malaysia. Most of them are Malays and Bumiputeras. Although there is some research on non-Chinese students in SJKCs, no research has taken place in Selangor. This study aims to investigate why Malay parents sent their children to SJKC and their expectations for their children's education in SJKC. This study also explored the academic achievement patterns and factors that affected students' learning outcomes. A total of 113 Malay students and 111 teachers from 5 selected SJKCs in Klang, Selangor, participated in this study. The data collection method used in this study included surveys, interviews, and content analysis. Descriptive statistics and qualitative approaches were used to analyse the data collected. The reason Malay parents in Klang sent their children to SJKC was more inclined to instrumental motivational factors. Malay parents wanted their children to master the Chinese language because of its high economic value, leading to better prospects in the future. The overall academic achievement of the Malay students in this study is less satisfactory. Lastly, the factors affecting students' Chinese language acquisition included students' academic ability, attitude and motivation. The external factors are the family's lack of a Chinese language environment, parents having low expectations, and a lack of spiritual and material support. The findings of this research will help Malay parents and teachers in SJKCs to have a better understanding of the learning situation of Malay students in SJKCs in Klang. Malay parents should give more attention and support their children's learning process in SJKCs, as early as possible.*

# 1. INTRODUCTION

The interest by non-Chinese students to study in Chinese national-type primary school or Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Cina (SJKC) seems to be on an increasing trend. According to the report by the Ministry of Education, the number of non-Chinese students in SJKCs increased from 11.84% in 2010 to 19.75% in 2020. The current Minister of Education, Mohd Radzi Md Jidin, mentioned that the number of Chinese students studying in SJKC decreased from 88.16% in 2010 to 80.25% in 2020. The Minister also pointed out that in 2020, the breakdown of the SJKC's non-Chinese student proportion is as follows: Malay 15.33%, Indian 2.75%, and other races 1.67%, in total 19.75% (New Strait Times, 11 Nov 2020). Table 1 shows the statistics of non-Chinese students in all SJKCs in Malaysia from 1989 to 2020, while Figure 1 shows the trend of the numbers of non-Chinese students in SJKCs.

Table 1. Statistics of Non-Chinese Students in SJKC

<i>Year</i>	<i>Total Number of Students</i>	<i>Number of Non-Chinese Students</i>	<i>Percent (%)</i>
<b>1989</b>	567,803	17,309	3.1
<b>1994</b>	583,825	32,203	5.5
<b>1998</b>	601,155	52,043	8.7
<b>1999</b>	609,673	65,000	10.7
<b>2010</b>	603,192	71,418	11.8
<b>2014</b>	559,157	87,463	15.3
<b>2016</b>	540,290	97,252	18.0
<b>2020</b>	509,589	100,644	19.75

Source: The Ministry of Education, Malaysia; Jiao Zong, 2018; Enanyang, 2020; New Strait Times, 2020.

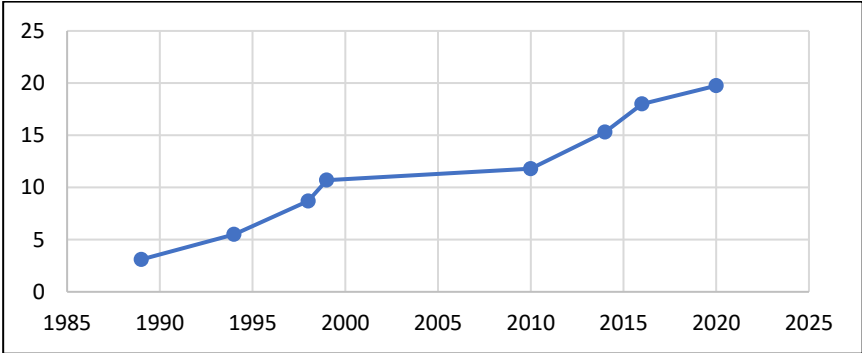


Figure 1. Trend of Non-Chinese Students Enrolment in SJKCs from 1989 - 2020

Figure 2 shows the comparison between the total number of students and the number of non-Chinese students in SJKCs from 2009 to 2020. Figure 2 shows that non-Chinese students have increased while the total number has decreased since 2014. The total number of students in SJKCs have dropped from 603,192 in 2010 to 559,157 in 2014, then to 509,589 in 2020 (see Table 1). According to the 2018 report by the Chinese School Teachers’ Association of Malaysia (Jiao Zong), the decreasing trend of the total number of students is due to the decreasing birth rate of the Chinese population in Malaysia. Besides, many Chinese parents sent their children to private and international schools, which provided better English education. In this case, an unusual phenomenon has occurred whereby the total number of students in SJKCs has decreased, but there is a drastic increase in the number of non-Chinese students. There are a few possibilities of why this could be happening. The first possibility could be the rise of China’s economy, which prompted the parents to send their children to SJKCs to learn

the Chinese language. The second possibility could be that the quality of education in SJKCs is attractive to Malay parents. The third possibility could be because there are geographical advantages of the SJKCs. This study aims to study the Malay parents' intention to send their children to SJKCs in Klang, Selangor.

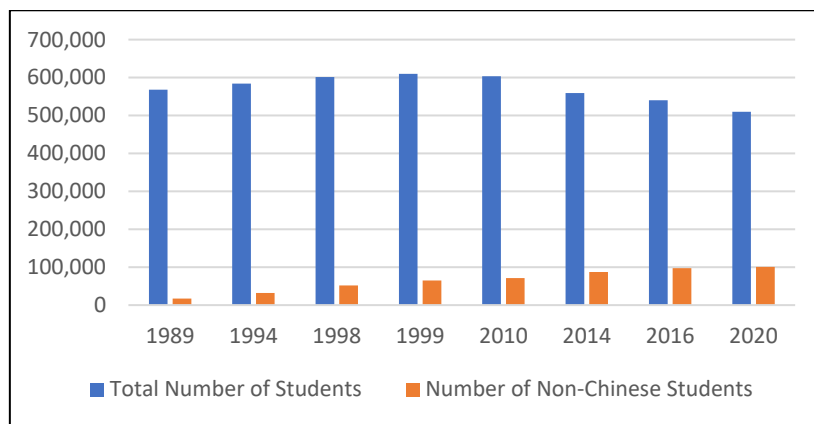


Figure 2. Comparison between Total Students and Non-Chinese Students in SJKCs

There is a need for research on the learning situation of non-Chinese students in SJKCs. As shown in Table 1, in 2020, over 100,000 non-Chinese students are studying in SJKCs all over Malaysia, and most of them are Malays and Bumiputeras (indigenous people). To date, there has been minimal research done on the learning situation of non-Chinese students in SJKC. One of the earliest relevant research was by Heng and Neo (2005), in which they researched the learning situation of the Malay students in 7 SJKCs in Kelantan. Neo and Heng investigated the intention of the Malay parents in sending their children to study in SJKC. Through their findings, they have identified problems faced in the children's learning process. Ten years later, Tan (2015) did similar research on 14 SJKCs in Kelantan. Other researchers had conducted other research topics on non-Chinese or Malay students in SJKCs in various states in Malaysia. Some of them also looked into the intentions and reasons of Malay parents sending their children to study in SJKC, and these included three relevant research in Johor (Asmahani, 2009; Tay, 2006; Yahaya & Abd Hamid, 2003), and three in Perak, Pahang and Negeri Sembilan (Zeng, 2017; Lin, 2009; Tan, Ngu & Chew, 2017). On the other hand, Zaki (2017) and Muhammad Fikri (2017) researched the religious studies of the SJKC Malay students in Johor Bahru, Johor. Marimun and Ahmad (2019) examined the history subject of Malay students. Researches were also done in East Malaysia, Sarawak (Tay 2012; Ngien & Ching, 2016) and Sabah (Cui, 2011; Bi, 2019).

Numerous researches were conducted on non-Chinese students in SJKCs, but no such research has taken place in Selangor. Therefore, the researchers have decided to focus on Klang's selected SJKCs with many Malay students for this study. The main purposes of this study are: (1) to identify the intentions of the Malay parents sending their children to Klang's SJKC; (2) to study the Chinese language performance of Malay students in Klang's SJKC; (3) to study the factors that affect the learning of Chinese language among Malay students in Klang's SJKC. It is hoped that the findings of this research will benefit the public significantly to help Malay parents and teachers in SJKCs to have a better understanding of the learning situation of Malay students in Klang's SJKC. This study provided some suggestions to parents, teachers and schools on improving Malay students' learning.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section mainly discusses past research on why non-Chinese parents send their children to SJKCs and the learning progress of non-Chinese students in SJKCs. Past studies have found that the primary purpose of non-Chinese parents sending their children to SJKCs is to allow them to master three languages. In addition to Malay and English, these parents want their children to learn Chinese well (Heng & Neo, 2005; Tan, 2015; Tan et al., 2017; Yahaya et al., 2003; Zeng, 2017). A study by Heng and Neo (2005) reported that Malay parents sent their children to SJKCs to master three languages or acquire the Chinese language. Still, they were also motivated by other factors, notably the education quality of SJKCs. These parents believed that in SJKC, the discipline is better, teachers are more diligent, it is easier to cultivate children's learning attitude, the mathematics education quality is relatively high. The academic competition atmosphere is relatively strong. Other minor considerations included meeting parents' wishes, wanting to learn more about Chinese culture and traditions, and having family members of Chinese descent. Tan (2015) also conducted a similar survey on 300 Malay parents in 14 SJKCs in Kelantan to determine the factors for sending their children to SJKCs. The survey showed the main reason was for their children's future and personality shaping. Indeed, the quality of education, administration and learning environment were also among the main attractions. Parents expected their children to have a better future by getting educated in Chinese schools. In addition, Zeng (2017) also reported about non-Chinese students attending Chinese primary schools in SJKC Ping Min Pundut, Lumut. The study found that parents favour Chinese primary schools because they were aware of the importance of Chinese and wanted their children to master a different language to enhance their competitiveness in future.

Based on the above studies, it was found that non-Chinese and Malay parents sent their children to SJKCs to receive Chinese education mainly due to the economic value of the Chinese language. Parents realised that the economic value of the Chinese language is getting higher. They hoped their children would master this language to strengthen their competitiveness in the workplace, have more job offers and better prospects in the future. Of course, non-Chinese parents also sent their children to SJKCs for SJKCs' quality of education. In addition to exploring why non-Chinese parents send their children to SJKCs, there are also a lot of papers on Chinese language acquisition among non-Chinese students in SJKCs in Malaysia. Heng and Neo (2005) found that Malay students faced fewer difficulties in listening and speaking the Chinese language but encountered problems identifying and writing Chinese characters after regurgitation from memory. Therefore, they did not perform well in writing and understanding Chinese; and they also experienced some difficulties in reading Chinese. Thus, their results in Chinese writing and reading were slightly weaker compared to listening and speaking.

In a study by Tay (2012), it was found that the learning outcome was less effective if the first language teaching method was used with non-Chinese students. Tay's research focused on the Chinese language teaching and acquisition of non-Chinese students in SJKCs in Sarawak. The study also found that Chinese language acquisition was abnormal among non-Chinese students. None of the teachers surveyed was satisfied with the results of non-Chinese students in the Chinese language. They believed that non-Chinese students did not perform as well as Chinese students as 45% of the students surveyed failed their Chinese language with a score of fewer than 39 marks. Tay believes that SJKC is not an ideal learning environment for non-Chinese students to master the Chinese language. On the other hand, Bi (2019) studied the academic performance of non-Chinese students in SJKC Yuk Yin, Sabah. The research focused on analysing the influences of teachers' teaching mode, teaching materials used, teachers' teaching concept and family environment on the academic performance of non-Chinese students in SJKC Yuk Yin, Sabah. The study found that the academic performance of non-Chinese students in

SJKC Yuk Yin differed significantly from Chinese students. Non-Chinese students were lowly motivated and had difficulty in maintaining learning motivation. The study also found that factors such as shortage of teachers, improper teaching patterns, and the external environment of the language were not conducive for learning. They had significant impacts on the academic performance of non-Chinese students. The external environment factor of not being conducive to learning the language included non-Chinese students having limited exposure to the Chinese language due to environmental factors, non-Chinese parents having lower expectations on their children's achievement in the Chinese language, and non-Chinese parents not understanding Chinese. Therefore, they found it difficult to help with their children's homework. Thus, non-Chinese students' exposure to the Chinese language was limited to only school learning time. There were many non-Chinese students in SJKC Yuk Yin, much more than the number of Chinese students. Bi believed that this environment is not conducive for non-Chinese students to master the Chinese language.

Based on the above studies, it can be concluded that most non-Chinese students do not perform well in Chinese (Bi, 2019; Heng & Neo, 2005; Ngien & Ching, 2016; Tan, 2015; Tay, 2012; Zeng, 2017). Some of the significant factors that affect children's learning outcomes are teachers' teaching methods (Bi, 2019; Tay, 2012), language environment at home, and parents' expectations and support (Bi, 2019; Heng & Neo, 2005; Tan, 2015).

### **3. METHOD**

Five SJKCs in Klang, Selangor, were selected as samples of this study. The five SJKCs included small, medium, and large-sized schools with general to excellent academic achievements. However, these schools were chosen because the number of Malay students in these five SJKCs is relatively large compared to other SJKCs. Teachers, Malay students and their parents from these 5 SJKCs were selected as participants of this study. These five SJKCs were labelled as School A, School B, School C, School D and School E. A total of 111 teachers, 113 Malay students and their parents participated in this research. For this study, students selected were from upper-primary classes. They were Year 4 and Year 5 students (Year 6 students who had to prepare for UPSR were not allowed to participate in this survey). There were two reasons for choosing Year 4 and Year 5 students as the samples of this study. Firstly, it would be more difficult for lower-primary students to answer the questionnaire accurately because some of the contexts in the questionnaire were beyond their ability to understand. Secondly, upper-primary students have been studying in the school for some time, and thus their parents and teachers would have a better understanding of their learning situation in school. Therefore, the study would obtain more reliable and objective information.

The data collection method used in this study are mainly surveys, interviews, and content analysis. The researchers conducted a questionnaire survey on teachers, students and their parents. The questionnaire constructed for students and parents consisted of three parts. The first part was to investigate their family background and the second part was to examine the parents' intention of sending their children to SJKCs. Parents answered both parts of the questionnaire. In contrast, the third part investigated the problems faced by Malay students when studying in SJKCs. A specific form was prepared to collect and analyse the students' academic performance based on the students' performance reports provided by each school. The objective was to explore the features of their learning achievement. Students' questionnaires were administered face-to-face at the selected schools. Although the researchers assumed that the upper-primary students could answer the questionnaire by themselves, the researchers were there for any enquiry to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the responses to the questionnaire. The first and second parts of the questionnaire, which were the parents'