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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Understanding Motivational Influences on Withdrawal Among Orang Asli Secondary Students in Perak

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how the influence of motivation affects withdrawal among secondary school students in Orang Asli (OA) in Perak. Education has been universally acknowledged as a basic right and it is a crucial factor in the social and economic growth of the Orang Asli communities in Malaysia. In spite of this appreciation, OA students still experience problems in adapting to the national education curriculum. The main aim of this research was to study the withdrawal trends amongst OA secondary school students in Perak. The study was conducted in a qualitative approach, and semi-structured interviews were used to investigate the perceptions and experiences of teachers and students in the particular issue of school withdrawal. Four experienced teachers who worked directly with OA students and three OA students were interviewed. The questions were aimed at the factors that led to the withdrawal in secondary schools. The interpretation of of the interview data indicated that the withdrawal decision was a key issue that was driven by lack of motivation. These results highlighted the role of motivation in determining the withdrawal patterns among OA students in Perak. All in all, the findings indicated that the motivational issues may be a key to comprehending the withdrawal patterns.

Contribution/Originality: The paper primarily contributes by revealing how various motivational factors influence school withdrawal among Orang Asli secondary students

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in Perak, offering insights into the underlying reasons behind their disengagement and highlighting areas for targeted educational intervention.

1. Introduction

The issue of Orang Asli students leaving school before completing secondary education remains an ongoing problem in Malaysia, despite decades of targeted policies and programmes since independence in 1957 (Wan, 2021; Ya Shin Wan, 2021). In 2021, the Ministry of Education reported that 42.29% of Orang Asli students did not complete schooling up to Form Five, a statistic highlighted in Bernama's coverage and described as a worrying trend (Bernama, 2022). Recent research in rural areas such as Sungai Siput in Perak has also documented high transitional dropout among Indigenous pupils, indicating that the problem continues to be highly visible in Orang Asli communities in rural districts (Ahmad et al., 2023).

The contributions of socio-economic limitations, cultural factors, and language barriers have been identified as relevant factors of withdrawal issue by international scholarship, such as Hollinsworth et al. (2020). However, there is still a lack of literature on the particular effect of motivational variables on the choices of Orang Asli students to continue or drop out of school. Motivation is a critical factor that can influence academic participation, and is subject to influence through family encouragement, peer influence, teacher encouragement, and student ambitions.

To Orang Asli students, the tension between their cultural identity, community expectations, and the demands of schooling can either enhance or undermine their motivation and, consequently, their academic pathways (Idrus, Yaacob, & Abdul Razak, 2023). A detailed understanding of motivation within this sociocultural environment is therefore critical for designing interventions that are culturally responsive and sustainable in Orang Asli classrooms (Idrus et al., 2023).

1.1. Research Objective

To identify secondary school withdrawal trends among Orang Asli students in Perak.

1.2. Research Question

What are the school withdrawal trends among Orang Asli secondary students in Perak

2. Literature Review

The literature review explores how motivational factors influence Orang Asli students' decisions to withdraw from secondary school, while synthesizing past studies about global educational disparities and cultural barriers among Indigenous students, the role of culturally responsive education in supporting retention and engagement, educational and language challenges faced by Orang Asli in Malaysia, and the main theoretical frameworks that guide this field of research.

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2.1. Global Educational Disparities and Cultural Barriers Among Indigenous Students

The indigenous communities around the world face numerous challenges in the accessibility and completing formal education. These barriers are highly embedded in historical, socioeconomic, and cultural backgrounds that have historically marginalized indigenous people. As an example, the dropout rates of Indigenous students in Australia, Canada, and the United States are significantly higher in comparison to those of non-indigenous students, which may be explained by systemic barriers, cultural dissonance, and socioeconomic inequities (Hollinsworth et al., 2020).

In the Canadian framework, there is a consistent low performance of First Nations, Inuit, and Metis students compared to non-aboriginal students, even though there is an abundance of policy measures to reduce the educational disparity (Bodkin-Andrews and Carlson, 2016). The lack of funding, the lack of culturally relevant curricula, and the legacy of the traumatic experience of the residential school system persistently hinder the Indigenous learners in the generations to come.

Similarly, in Australia, the cultural gaps between the school setting and the home life of Indigenous students have been proved to be associated with increased educational disengagement. When Indigenous knowledge, languages, and cultural practices are marginalized in the mainstream education, Indigenous students often feel alienated, discomfort, and excluded, and this dampens their sense of belonging in the school setting (Thackrah et al., 2021). These experiences usually lead to haphazard attendance, poor relationships with teachers and classmates, and loss of confidence in academic performance, which eventually threatens long-term educational involvement. This pattern shows that the motivation and the engagement of Indigenous students are not only a personal or psychological phenomenon but are strongly influenced by the socio-cultural conditions of the environment, especially the degree to which educational institutions recognize, respect, and embrace Indigenous identities and values (Thackrah et al., 2021; Gibbs et al., 2022).

2.1. The Role of Culturally Responsive Education in Enhancing Retention and Engagement

To address these issues, researchers have highlighted the significance of culturally inclusive education systems that encourage respect and assimilation of the indigenous values and worldviews. An example of this is the Truth and Reconciliation Commision (TRC, 2015) in Canada which highlighted that First Nations, Metis, and Inuit students need culturally appropriate education systems. The Comission suggests that indigenous wisdom, traditions, and practices should be included in mainstream education to overcome cultural differences and enhance reconciliation (Battiste, 2013).

The culturally responsive teaching, which is a model that is gaining popularity in the United States, also aims at recognizing and rewarding the cultural identities of the students in the classroom setting. Gay (2018) emphasizes that this strategy is supposed to establish supportive and inclusive classrooms that legitimize the lived experiences, beliefs, and traditions of indigenous students. Cultural relevance can be incorporated into pedagogy, and this approach will help educators to engage indigenous learners more deeply, make them feel proud and belong to their community.

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In a Canadian study, Nelson et al. (2018) found that the high withdrawal rates among indigenous students influenced the completion rate of indigenous students, particularly in post-secondary education. As an example, the withdrawal rate at the Saskatchewan Polytechnic School of Nursing was 4.2⁻ on indigenous students compared to their non-indigenous counterparts. This implies that the traditional approaches to teaching do not address the cultural and emotional requirements of these students. The researchers made a conclusion that cultural responsiveness-based pedagogical innovation plays a vital role in enhancing motivation and persistence among indigenous students.

Motivation in this case is the psychological product of cultural confirmation. Students will be more intrinsically motivated to attend school and do well when they perceive their cultural identities as important and incorporated into the educational process. Culturally responsive teaching therefore enhances emotional involvement as well as academic perseverance, which makes the education system meaningful and personally relevant.

2.2. Educational Challenges and Language Barriers Among Orang Asli in Malaysia

The challenges facing the Orang Asli people in Malaysia are similar to those faced by the native communities in the rest of the world. Aidil Fitri bin Sawalludin et al. (2020) noted that, even with an RM64.1billion allocation to the education sector in the 2020 national budget, the educational performance of the Orang Asli is still lower than that of other ethnic groups.

Language is a major challenge to Orang Asli education. According to Md-Ali et al. (2021), Orang Asli students often have problems with understanding lengthy and complex mathematical word problems, especially when they are given in new linguistic forms. This challenge causes the students to use simple arithmetic instead of reasoning. In the same vein, Norwaliza and Ramlee (2015) observed that certain Orang Asli students struggle to listen to the teacher explaining things in Malay, which leads to a lack of classroom engagement and confidence.

Hence, in studies by Letchamanan et al. (2021) of Orang Asli children in the diagnostic reading and writing tests in both Bahasa Melayu and English found that there was a great diversity in the level of performance and attention span. Some students were able to stay focused but others soon became bored because of the difficulty in comprehension and those with lower reading ability would simply lose interest altogether. These results highlight the relationship between language barriers and academic motivation. Positively, studies have shown that culturally inclusive learning programs can help to boost motivation and retention of Orang Asli students. As an example, the use of Orang Asli languages, practices and knowledge systems in the curriculum has been found to enhance participation and a sense of belonging.

Additionally, systemic educational inequalities faced by indigenous students in Australia, Canada and the United States stem from marginalisation, socioeconomic disadvantage and cultural dissonance. These difficulties increase the rate of dropouts and reduce the completion rate in comparison to non-Indigenous peers (Quincho et al., 2025). Lack of congruence between educational settings and cultural identities of students means that Indigenous students tend to feel alienated and de-motivated, which underscores the significance of culturally congruent education. Therefore, as a result, culturally responsive teaching models have become the subject of growing focus, with the focus on the incorporation of Indigenous values, languages, and traditions to promote a sense of

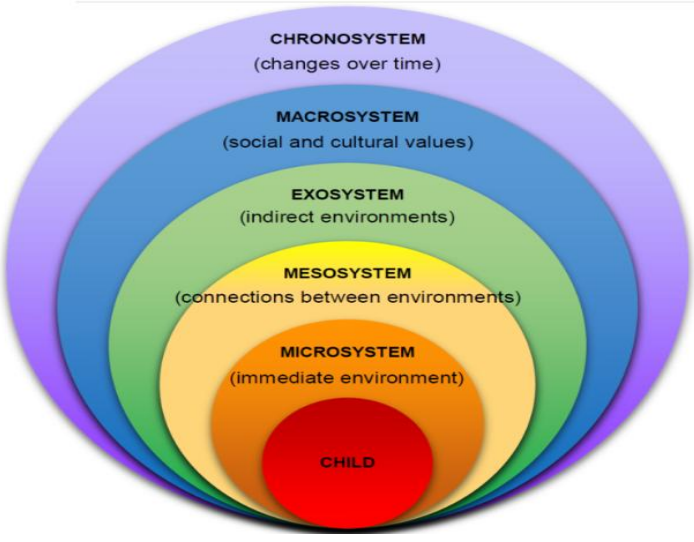
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belonging, motivation, and academic engagement (Quincho et al., 2025). The same trends have been noted in Malaysia where Orang Asli students have experienced chronic dropout rates due to socioeconomic factors, inaccessibility to culturally relevant curriculums, and language barriers that hinder understanding and classroom engagement (Suthan & Saludin, 2025). It has been shown that culturally inclusive practices, including the use of the Orang Asli language and cultural knowledge in teaching and the reinforcement of community and family engagement, increase the motivation, engagement, and educational retention of students (Suthan & Saludin, 2025).

2.3. Theoretical Framework

This paper uses the Ecological Systems Theory of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) as one of the theoretical frameworks that conceptualise human development as a result of mutual interaction between various environmental systems. The study focuses on the first three levels of the model namely the microsystem, mesosystem and exosystem to explain the multilayered effects on student motivation. The microsystem is the direct environment that has a direct impact on the learner and includes family relationships, the teaching personnel, the interaction with peers, and the school environment. The mesosystem is the interaction of components of the microsystem; an example is the interaction between parents and teachers or the interaction of the school and community organisations. The exosystem is the external systems that have an indirect influence on the students including school policies, community support systems and educational programs designed to support Orang Asli students. Using this theoretical approach, the study explores how motivation is built in these systems that are interconnected, and not just by an individual psychological construct. The detailed is shown in the figure below (Figure 1).

Figure 1: The Ecological Systems Theory by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979)



3. Research Methods

The methodology of this study was a qualitative case study conducted at one secondary school in Perak with a large Orang Asli population. Qualitative research was selected because this study sought to understand the meanings, experiences, and reasons behind students' withdrawal from school, rather than simply measuring its frequency (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). It allowed participants to speak in their own

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words and provided rich descriptions of personal, family, and school factors that structured questionnaires may overlook (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This approach suited exploring complex educational issues where context and participant voice were central (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

3.1. Study Population and Sampling

The study population consisted of Form 3 Orang Asli students and their teachers. Purposive sampling selected students who could express themselves clearly (n=3) and subject teachers (n=4), totaling seven participants to capture multiple withdrawal perspectives. This sample size achieved data saturation for the single-case study while respecting school access constraints (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

3.2. Data Collection

Data collection consisted of two semi-structured group interviews conducted in person at the school. Session one involved four teachers interviewed together (40-60 minutes); session two involved three Form 3 students interviewed together separately (40-60 minutes). All sessions were audio-recorded with consent (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

3.3. Data Analysis

Data analysis followed Creswell and Poth's (2018) five-step spiral:

i. Organizing the data: Transcriptions read repeatedly for familiarisation.
ii. Exploring the data: Immersion to identify initial meanings/patterns.
iii. Coding: Open coding → categories.
iv. Interpreting: Categories clustered into four themes with quotes.
v. Representing findings: Themes labelled with teacher/student evidence.

This systematic process revealed four themes: (1) Family and Peers' Influence, (2) School Environment, (3) Students' Aspirations and Self-Efficacy, and (4) Cultural and Social Dynamics.

3.4. Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was granted by the UiTM Research Ethics Committee (REC/05/2025 (PG/MR/292)). All seven participants provided individual written informed consent and were informed of the study's purpose, withdrawal rights, confidentiality, and anonymity measures. Audio data were stored securely on password-protected devices.

3.5. Researchers' Observation

At the beginning, the students were unwilling to engage in verbal communication; however, the presence of a counsellor seemed to improve their participation, as the number of verbal contributions increased, and the facial expressions and body language changed. The interviews were held in Bahasa Malaysia, depending on the language choices of the participants. (See Table 1).

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Table 1: Participants' information

Teachers	Students
T1	S1
T2	S2
T3	S3
T4	

4. Results and Discussion

This chapter presents and discussess the key findings on the factors that influence Orang Asli students'decision to withdraw from secondary school.

4.1. Family and Peers Influence on Motivation

Family and peer networks are among the most decisive factors influencing Orang Asli students' motivation. Teachers consistently pointed to the fragile socioeconomic status of many Orang Asli families, which restricts their ability to prioritize education. For example, T1 explained:

> *"There are families who are mostly poor, to the point that some don't have food to eat. Some of them told us they didn't eat, and some said, "If there's food, then we eat… if there's none, we just don't." It's sad to hear, right… The families can't afford for them to continue studying… There are also some who said their parents have passed away, and they are taken care of by their grandfather or grandmother… Last year, some said it's not that they don't want to continue studying, but it's because of family constraints."*

This quote reveals that financial struggles and lack of parental presence often lead to early school withdrawal. In such cases, children are required to assume household responsibilities, effectively sidelining their schooling. This aligns with literature which states that poverty and limited parental involvement are major barriers to Indigenous students' educational persistence (Nordin & Othman, 2020; Nicholas, 2019).

Peers, on the other hand, serve as a double-edged sword. Positive peer relationships enhance motivation, as expressed by S1 *("It's fun to have friends")* and S2 *("I like it here because there are many friends. If I'm in the village, it's just like staying at home all the time..")*. These testimonies suggest that school becomes a space of social belonging, motivating students to attend despite external challenges.

However, peer dynamics also operate negatively. T1 and T2 highlighted how boys are often influenced by friends who leave school for work:

> *"These boys, there's just one thing. .once they get influenced by the village life, once they start working… they can start sending money." by T1*

> *"Another thing about them is… they have a lot of jobs — many work opportunities for them, in their own way. So when they start earning money… that's why they don't come to school for a long time… they only come back just to sit for the SPM exam." by T2*

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This demonstrates how peer modelling of dropout can normalize withdrawal. In such cases, leaving school is framed not as failure but as a culturally accepted, even pragmatic choice, especially when income is valued more than academic achievement. Positive peer interactions make school a socially meaningful space, motivating attendance. Yet, some students particularly male students are influenced by peers who withdraw from school to work and earn income. This reflects existing literature that peer modeling and immediate economic gains normalize school dropout among Orang Asli adolescents (Renganathan, 2016; Jamaludin & Razali, 2022). (See Table 2)

Table 2: Family and Peers' Influences on Motivation

Influence	Example Quote	Effect
Economic hardship	*T1: "Most of the families are really poor … to the point that some don't even have food to eat. Some of them told us they hadn't eaten, and some said, "If there's food, then we eat… if there's none, then we don't." It's sad to hear, right… The families can't afford for them to continue their studies… There are also some who said their parents have passed away, and they are being cared for by their grandfather or grandmother… Last year, some mentioned that it's not that they don't want to continue studying, but it's because of family constraints."*	Negative – students withdraw to ease family burden
Peer friendship	*S1: "It's fun to have friends."* *S2: "I like it here because there are many friends. If I'm in the village, it's just like staying at home all the time."* *"For me, being at home feels different. The feeling is different too. It's really peaceful at home. But school is also nice because there are many friends to talk to. And the school area is beautiful. I like it."*	Positve - school becomes enjoyable
Peer modeling dropout	*T1:"These boys, there's just one thing…once they get influenced by the village life, once they start working… they can start sending money."* *T2:"Another thing about them is… they have many jobs… many work opportunities in their own way. So, when they start earning money… that's why they don't come to school for a long time… they only come back just to sit for the SPM exam."*	Negative - withdrawal seen as attractive option as the students can work and gain money on the spot

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Family support	*T3:"Sometimes, they(parents) ask the teacher to persuade them(students) because they say they can't advise them… they're not capable. So when the teacher goes, it's the teacher who will persuade them."*	Positive - collaboration with teachers encourages return

4.2. School Environment as a Motivational Driver

The school environment plays a pivotal role in sustaining Orang Asli students' motivation, often serving as the main counterforce against withdrawal. Teachers repeatedly emphasized the importance of the boarding school setting, which provides structure, supervision, and focus that are difficult to replicate in the village context. As T2 observed*: "The secret is that the students here stay in the hostel… morning, evening, day, and night they can really focus… and the teachers here are also the committed type."* Her statement illustrates how the physical environment of the hostel, combined with the dedication of teachers, creates a space where students are shielded from external distractions and can devote themselves more fully to learning.

Another critical factor within the school environment is the emotional support that teachers provide. For many Orang Asli students, the school becomes not just a place of academic instruction but also a site of emotional validation and care. As T1 explained: *"When we praise them a little, their motivation will increase… it's like they're a bit lacking in affection… they're easily moved by praise."* Her words suggest that praise, which may appear small or routine in other contexts, carries outsized importance for these students, many of whom may experience a lack of encouragement or affection at home. This view was echoed by students themselves. S3 shared: *"The teachers care more about helping us to study. Besides that, they also give motivational words…"* Her reflection confirms that when teachers invest emotionally and use motivational language, students respond positively and are more likely to sustain their engagement in school.

Pedagogical strategies also emerged as an important driver of motivation. Teachers described how they consciously adapt their teaching to accommodate students' learning needs and prevent them from falling behind. For instance, T2 explained: *"For the History subject… the tone needs to be lowered a bit… if there's too much content in one day, the next day they'll forget, so it needs to be repeated again and again."* This highlights the teachers' awareness of the cognitive demands placed on their students and their efforts to reduce overwhelm by simplifying and repeating content. Such adjustments not only help students grasp difficult material but also protect their motivation, as repeated academic failure could otherwise lead to discouragement and eventual withdrawal.

Beyond the classroom, the school also invests in outreach and retention initiatives to address the issue of absenteeism and dropout. As S2 recounted: *"When we go for [Ziarah Cakna visits], they will come… the school also has many programs… the main goal of this school is to overcome dropouts."* Her comment reveals how proactive home visits and reintegration programs act as lifelines for students at risk of dropping out. This is consistent with literature emphasizing teacher relationships, culturally responsive pedagogy, and school-based support programs as crucial motivational drivers for Indigenous students (Shahruddin & Hashim, 2021; Abdullah et al., 2020). These efforts demonstrate that the school environment extends beyond its walls, actively seeking to rebuild relationships with students and families to secure re-enrolment. This research

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shows teachers actively modifying pedagogy, offering emotional support, and conducting outreach such as Ziarah Cakna. This reflects a stronger educator commitment than commonly reported in earlier research, suggesting some Malaysian rural schools are improving culturally responsive support systems.

Taken together, the evidence suggests that the school environment is more than just a backdrop for learning; it is a dynamic motivational driver. Through structured facilities, teacher dedication, emotional reinforcement, adaptive pedagogy, and outreach programs, the school functions as a protective buffer against the external challenges students face. Without these environmental supports, the rate of withdrawal among Orang Asli students would likely be much higher.

4.3. Students' Aspirations and Self-Efficacy

The transcripts revealed that Orang Asli students hold clear vocational aspirations, which serve as important motivators for their schooling. S2, for instance, expressed a strong ambition to pursue a career as a flight attendant: *"My ambition is high… I want to be a flight attendant. But I'm not very confident."* While her aspiration reflects high ambition, her simultaneous self-doubt demonstrates the fragility of self-efficacy among some students. Here, aspiration exists, but it is undermined by a lack of confidence in her own abilities.

By contrast, other students demonstrated stronger self-belief. S3 articulated a clear alignment between her personal interest and her educational goal: *"I want to study for my future… my ambition is to become a counseling teacher… because I like how it involves giving motivation and promoting a healthy mind."* Her response reflects not only an aspiration but also a strong sense of purpose, connecting her personal values with a professional pathway. Similarly, S1 identified teaching as her future career: *"I want to be a teacher… a mathematics teacher."* aspirations are rooted in direct experiences of teaching and learning, which reinforces the motivational impact of positive school encounters.

Teachers supported the importance of aspirations by noting the role of role models in the community. T3 highlighted the significance of recent Orang Asli graduates who successfully advanced to teacher training colleges: *"Now we already have examples… seniors who have entered the teacher training institute (IPG)… about five of them, four are from this school. From there, we already have motivation… in the past, we lacked such examples."* Her statement underscores that when students see people from their own background succeed academically, it enhances their belief that higher education is attainable. Previous research commonly stressed that a lack of Indigenous role models weakened long-term aspirations among Orang Asli youth (Hollinsworth et al., 2020). However, this study found an emerging trend, students increasingly refer to successful Orang Asli graduates (e.g., entry to teacher training institutes) as inspiration. This suggests a shift from earlier literature, where limited exposure hindered identity-based confidence building.

Nevertheless, teachers also identified potential barriers to self-efficacy. According to T4, many Orang Asli students rely heavily on external support for their future: *"The mindset of the people here is that if they want to continue studying, it has to be 100% supported by the government… they rely solely on the government."* This reliance reveals a lack of internalized confidence and suggests that even where aspirations exist, they may not always be supported by a strong sense of personal agency.

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Taken together, these findings demonstrate that Orang Asli students do aspire to meaningful careers, but their persistence depends heavily on whether those aspirations are backed by strong self-efficacy. Where aspirations are paired with confidence and supported by role models, students are more likely to remain in school. Conversely, when self-belief is weak or externalized, students remain vulnerable to withdrawal.

4.4. Cultural and Social Dynamics

Cultural traditions and social obligations were also found to shape Orang Asli students' school experiences in both positive and negative ways. Teachers emphasized that communal responsibilities often take precedence over formal education. For instance, T1 observed: *"Here, everyone is related… if there's a death, everyone will go back, and that person will be absent for a week."* Such practices reflect the value placed on kinship and community solidarity but directly conflict with school attendance, leading to prolonged absences and, in some cases, disengagement.

Local leadership, particularly the role of the *tok batin* (village head), also affects students' school motivation. As T1 explained, *"If the village head (tok batin) is easygoing, then there will be a lot of activities. But each village has a different tok batin."* The degree of support for schooling therefore varies across communities, depending on whether the local leader is proactive in encouraging education. This highlights how cultural governance structures can either strengthen or weaken motivation.

Cultural identity was also evident in everyday practices such as dietary restrictions. S3 shared that *"If a woman is on her period, she cannot eat fish… or watermelon."* While such food taboos do not directly impact schooling, they symbolize the broader cultural framework within which students negotiate their educational journeys. Teachers recognized these cultural elements and noted the importance of respecting them to build trust and rapport with students and families.

Language was another significant dimension of cultural dynamics. Students expressed appreciation when teachers respected their heritage language, Temiar, yet they were also pragmatic about the importance of mastering Malay and English for their future. S3 explained: *"If the teacher also understands the Temiar language… we like it. But we also want to learn Malay and English because it'll be easier to find a job later."* S2, however, raised a concern: *"It's okay if the teacher learns the Temiar language… but we're afraid that if they get too used to it… it might be hard to speak other languages later."* These contrasting perspectives show that while heritage language use fosters belonging, students themselves recognize the necessity of national and global languages for socioeconomic advancement.

Earlier literature emphasized cultural identity as sometimes conflicting with mainstream education systems and language norms (Hollinsworth et al., 2021). In contrast, participants here demonstrated a strategic bilingual perspective valuing Temiar language and identity while acknowledging the need for Malay and English for future employment.

This research uniquely demonstrates the influence of tok batin leadership variations, showing how different villages' leaders shape educational attitudes a perspective less explored in prior studies.

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5. Conclusion and Recommendation

The findings of this study reveal that the motivation and withdrawal trends of Orang Asli secondary school students are shaped by a complex interaction of family and peer influences, the school environment, students' aspirations and self-efficacy, and cultural and social dynamics. Each theme demonstrates both protective and risk factors that either sustain students in education or push them toward withdrawal.

Family and peers emerge as double-edged forces: while friendships at school foster belonging and motivation, poverty, lack of parental support, and peer modeling of dropout often encourage early withdrawal. The school environment, by contrast, functions primarily as a protective driver, with teachers' dedication, praise, adapted pedagogy, and outreach efforts serving to counterbalance external challenges. Yet, even within this supportive setting, students' long-term persistence is closely linked to their personal aspirations and levels of self-efficacy. Aspirations such as becoming a teacher, counselor, or flight attendant provide direction, but their strength depends heavily on the students' belief in their own ability to achieve these goals and the presence of relatable role models within their communities.

Finally, cultural and social dynamics add an additional layer of complexity. Community obligations, such as mourning practices, and the authority of local leaders can interrupt schooling, while cultural identity expressed through language and traditions simultaneously enriches and complicates the learning experience. Students themselves recognize the importance of balancing their heritage with the mastery of Malay and English as tools for future mobility.

Overall, the analysis underscores that motivation among Orang Asli students cannot be understood in isolation from the broader ecological system in which they live. It is the interplay of home, school, community, and personal factors that determines whether they persist in education or withdraw. For interventions to be effective, they must adopt a holistic approach that strengthens family engagement, leverages peer networks positively, sustains school-based motivation, nurtures student aspirations, and integrates cultural respect with academic progression. Only through such multifaceted efforts can withdrawal trends among Orang Asli students be reduced, paving the way for greater educational attainment and empowerment within these communities.

Future research should examine the long-term impact of culturally responsive curricula on Orang Asli student retention, particularly through longitudinal studies that evaluate how sustained cultural integration in teaching influences academic persistence and motivation over time. To strengthen current efforts, this study recommends the integration of Orang Asli cultural values within the school curriculum to foster belonging and cultural affirmation, the provision of targeted support for students with low self-efficacy through mentorship and exposure to role models, and the enhancement of collaboration between families, schools, and local communities to build a unified support system that promotes consistent engagement and long-term educational success.

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Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

The researchers adhere to the research ethics guidelines established by the Research Ethics Committee of Universiti Teknologi Mara (RECUiTM). All procedures performed in this study involve human participants and was supervised by their counselling teachers.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare

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