



## **Drug Prevention Education Programs in Schools in High-Risk Areas: Challenges for Primary School Teachers in Malaysia**

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### **Abstract**

Drug prevention education programs have been implemented in primary and secondary schools in Malaysia. This study aimed to investigate the existing drug prevention education programs in primary schools in high-risk areas of Perak, Malaysia and to identify the challenges faced by primary school teachers to implement these programs. The methods used in this study was a qualitative case study design by using interviews for data collection. Seven participants, including primary school teachers, a Ministry of Education Malaysia officer, a National Anti-Drug Agency (NADA) Perak officer, and a State of Education Department officer, were involved as study samples. The results of the study showed that teachers still face problems delivering drug messages in the teaching-learning process because they do not have enough learning materials or knowledge. Teachers' challenges arise not only from the school or educational policy but also from parents' involvement. It can be concluded that the primary school teachers in Malaysia still face challenges related to their skills, community supports, and government policies in drug prevention education programs. It is expected the study can be used by the stakeholders when

planning and evaluating drug preventive in Malaysian primary schools especially in selected hot spot areas.

Keywords: *challenges, drug prevention, high-risk areas, primary school teachers.*

### **Abstrak**

Program pendidikan pencegahan narkoba telah dilaksanakan di sekolah dasar dan menengah di Malaysia. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menyelidiki program pendidikan pencegahan narkoba yang ada di sekolah dasar di daerah berisiko tinggi Perak, Malaysia dan untuk mengidentifikasi tantangan yang dihadapi oleh guru sekolah dasar untuk melaksanakan program ini. Metode yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus dengan menggunakan wawancara untuk pengumpulan data. Tujuh peserta, termasuk guru sekolah dasar, petugas Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, petugas Badan Anti Narkoba Nasional (NADA) Perak, dan petugas Departemen Pendidikan Negara Bagian, dilibatkan sebagai sampel penelitian. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa guru masih menghadapi kendala penyampaian pesan narkoba dalam proses belajar mengajar karena tidak memiliki bahan ajar atau pengetahuan yang cukup. Tantangan guru muncul tidak hanya dari sekolah atau kebijakan pendidikan, tetapi juga dari keterlibatan orang tua. Dapat disimpulkan bahwa guru sekolah dasar di Malaysia masih menghadapi tantangan terkait keterampilan mereka, dukungan masyarakat, dan kebijakan pemerintah dalam program pendidikan pencegahan narkoba. Diharapkan penelitian ini dapat digunakan oleh para pemangku kepentingan ketika merencanakan dan mengevaluasi program pencegahan narkoba di sekolah dasar Malaysia, khususnya di daerah yang terpilih.

Kata kunci: *tantangan, pencegahan narkoba, daerah berisiko tinggi, guru sekolah dasar.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Drug abuse was declared the number one enemy of the country on February 19, 1983 by the prime minister of Malaysia (Halim, 2020). February 19 was chosen as National Anti-Drugs Day in an effort to combat drugs. In June 1983, the government decided to give the responsibility for controlling and preventing drug use to the National Security Council (Amri et al., 2019). It is known that creating a completely drug-free environment in schools is impossible. However, the authorities have always made an effort to ensure that this disease can be curbed. Thus, the “drug-free” goal involves a combination of preventing and treating drug abuse as well as the recovery process. National Anti-Drug Agency released strategic plans for 2019-2022 to combat drug abuse through the strategic planning for prevention division (NADA, 2017). These strategic plans involve a drug-free family, drug-free educational institute, drug-free workplace, and drug-free community. In general, efforts to combat drug abuse in Malaysia have been comprehensive based on this strategic prevention plan. The extent to which this strategic plan succeeds in achieving a drug-free environment depends on the effectiveness of its implementation.

Several drug prevention programs have been conducted in primary and secondary schools in Malaysia. The programs have included: PIP (Program Intervensi Pelajar), INTIM Camp, PINTAR (Program Intelek Asuhan Rohani) PINTAR, SHIELDS, and Tomorrow's Leader (NADA, 2017). Despite the implementation of these various drug prevention

programs, the data still have shown that there are increasing numbers of drug users among youth, especially among school students (Ayllón & Ferreira-Batista, 2018; Saba et al., 2021). These facts show that drug education programs in Malaysian public schools have not been effective in reducing drug and substance abuse among students (Tan et al., 2018). A study is needed to evaluate the drug prevention programs for improving the self-esteem of students in an effort to avoid drug abuse (Amat et al., 2020; Ilhami et al., 2023).

The role of teachers in drug prevention is crucial because students spend most of their quality time with teachers in schools (Handrianto et al., 2021). Therefore, teachers need to have good and close relationships with students to make a greater impact. According to Qiu et al. (2015), teachers have an important role in preventing drug abuse. Teachers serve as an example for their students. They can educate them about solving their problems, choosing proper friends, identifying different kinds of drugs, and the dangers of drug abuse. In addition, open forums and debates on ways to stop drug addiction are activities that the school can use to promote drug-free lifestyles and produce collaboration between parents, teachers, and students (Bistamam et al., 2015; Hardiansyah & Zainuddin, 2022).

Studies related to drug prevention in the school context have been carried out by several researchers. Several studies have shown that a school that values teachers' roles and acknowledges the importance of the school's surroundings stands to win in terms of the students' moral and commitment not to use the drug (Moreira et al., 2015; Chan et al., 2016; Razali & Madon, 2016). Knowledge and motivation absolutely influence teachers' dispositions and their commitment to implementing programs as intended, as there have been buy-in and support for interventions that in turn can influence students' attitudes. Driven teachers have been seen to spearhead the implementation of programs that encourage students to avoid drug abuse. Teachers' perceptions of the implementation settings considerably influenced their reactions, which ultimately affected implementation (Waller et al., 2017; Ramadhani et al., 2022).

Teachers need to improve their knowledge and skills to be able to speak about drug abuse within the classroom and school settings (Chan et al., 2016; Jusoh et al., 2022). Therefore, Gizyatova (2016) suggested possible ways of enhancing the effectiveness of drug prevention in educational establishments that included positive motivation for teachers to implement elements of prevention, qualified pre-service training targeting effective prevention techniques, ongoing education and preparation for every teacher, the training of employees through suggested training courses, and the active cooperation of all agencies involved in prevention activities.

Primary school teachers have lack information and training to implementing prevention programs and addressing problems related to drug abuse (Chan et al., 2016; Zainil et al., 2023). In establishing the sustainability of school-based drug prevention education programs, prevention strategies are essential to addressing drug problems among students. Preventive programs should be built on the basis of a scientific model. Schools have multiple problems to overcome comprehensively drug and substance abuse among students (Grim & Grim, 2019; Handrianto et al., 2021). The objectives of this study were: (1) To investigate the existing drug use prevention education programs in Malaysia; and (2) To identify the challenges faced by teachers in implementing drug prevention programs. This study collected valid and current data based on the responses of teachers who have implemented drug prevention programs in

schools, which can be useful to the National Anti-Drugs Agency (NADA) and the Ministry of Education Malaysia.

## **METHODS**

Using a qualitative approach, this study implemented a case study design. The samples in this study were chosen using purposive sampling technique. There were seven participants officials selected and interviewed in this study, including four primary school teachers, a Ministry of Education Malaysia officer, a National Anti-Drug Agency Perak officer, and a state of education department. The instrument used to obtain qualitative data in this study was interview protocols (Ahmad et al., 2016; Fidrayani & Hadiati, 2020). During the interviews, the respondents were asked questions about their knowledge, skills, and challenges in relation to the implementation of drug use prevention education programs.

The research procedures began with the creation of interview protocols, which ensured the interviews were carried out systematically (Nengsih et al., 2022). The next step was identifying suitable participants for the study. The interviews then were carried out in several groups consisting of teachers and educational officers. On average, each interview was conducted approximately in two hours. Interviews were conducted in Bahasa Melayu (the Malay language) and translated into English as accurately as possible so that the original meanings were not lost. Data analysis used thematic analysis by starting with verbatim transcription, usually fairly soon after each interview had taken place. A “free” and “open” coding method was employed in order to classify the responses into meaningful themes, to be categorized based on the researchers’ analyses. Lastly, the results of the study were reported.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **The Existing Program of Drug Prevention Education Programs in Schools**

Different teachers in this study had different perspectives on the existing drug use prevention programs in Malaysian primary schools, as shown in the following two passages. The programs they described include drawing competitions, colouring, word-searches, poster making, advertising anti-drug information, quizzes, five-minutes-of anti-drugs message, talks, and coaching clinics.

*"I think... the PPDa [Drug Prevention Education] program runs well in my school, hmm... as at the beginning of the year various program launches were implemented. These programs include drawing competitions, colouring, word-search, poster making, and many others. We encourage the students to participate in that program by doing some interesting activities to them as the primary school students. Sometimes, PPDa teachers also advertise anti-drug information in certain places in the school for students to read. Students are involved in quizzes in the classroom and five-minutes-of anti-drugs in the school assembly meeting" (Female, Malay, Teacher).*

*"I think the drug prevention programs in primary school are hmm... less effective. There are some preventive programs such as talks, poster competitions, coaching clinics and others. But the effectiveness and success of the programs are still questioned" (Male, Malay, Teacher).*

Program provided by the National Anti-Drug Agency Malaysia, such as PINTAR aims to increase the awareness and development of self-restraint among primary school students between ages 10 to 12 years old, who have been identified as at-risk for drug abuse. The program's goals are to prevent the students from drug abuse, delay the onset of drug abuse among students, and implement the intervention for those who are involved in drug abuse.

*"The PINTAR program is always held and gets a positive response that students are happy to participate in. Students have a high curiosity. Besides the PINTAR program, counsellors always do follow-up with students"* (Female, Malay, Teacher).

PROSIDAR, another existing program that aims to help primary school students prevent drug abuse problems is provided by PEMADAM, a well-known non-governmental organization in Malaysia.

*"The PROSIDAR program that is held by PEMADAM that involves schools"* (Male, Indian, National Anti-Drug Agency).

Other initiatives have also been implemented that involve other parties such as the Royal Malaysia Police and the State of Education Department. For example, a special module was developed and provided in several schools in the state of Perak.

*"PDRM has monitored schools in high-risk areas. They will take the necessary action if they find any student involves with drugs. The presence of police at school has a positive impact, as students are more afraid to engage in drugs"* (Male, Malay, Ministry of Education Malaysia).

*"The Sahsiah Unggul Insan Terbilang Module (SUIT) module is also used to prevent students from getting involved with drugs"* (Female, Malay, State of Education Department).

### **The Perceptions and Skills of Teachers in Drug Use Prevention Education**

When asked about drug use prevention initiatives other than connecting with students during formal drug prevention education programs in schools, teachers said they tended to cooperate with parents so that prevention could be carried out progressively. The teachers understood that in implementing a drug use prevention program, it is necessary to involve all related parties.

*"The school also cooperates with parents in drug prevention efforts. The WhatsApp group was set up with parents for delivering messages on drug prevention programs and to inform about the condition in school, and they are not allowed to expose students "issues or shame"* (Female, Malay, Teacher).

*"Counseling teachers and PPDa hold sessions for students who are involved or not involved in drugs. The school also works with parents in drug prevention efforts. Hmm... I believe they still need our guidance"* (Female, Malay, Teacher).

*"The school is located not far from the students' house, so it is easy to know and connect with their parents. Hmm... my school lately has shown a declining number of cases of*

*students involved with drugs. This can be seen in the data from 2019 where there are zero cases" (Female, Malay, Teacher).*

Teachers also understood that exposure to drug use prevention programs needs to be provided earlier. Thus, students will be aware of and acknowledge drug abuse problems.

*"The drug prevention education program provides early exposure to primary school students about the danger of drugs. Generally, year 4 students know about the danger of drugs" (Male, Malay, Teacher).*

Teachers also created a standard operating procedure that could be used with any of their students who were involved in drug abuse. This helped teachers to manage problems systematically.

*"At school, there is a standard operating procedure known as 3K which will be implemented if the student is found guilty or involved with drugs" (Female, Malay, Teacher).*

### **The Challenges of Drug Use Prevention Education in School**

One of the challenges to the implementation of drug use prevention education is that teachers do not have proper guidance and training for conducting such programs. Implementers who lack skills in implementing the program will have negative impacts on the effectiveness of the drug programs.

*"As a teacher, I still have some problems in implementing PPDa programs in primary schools because there is no guide or syllabus provided by AADK and JPN. We were just told to create and implement the programs, but hmm... we don't know how to do it. So, I just used the internet as my main source. For example, for five-minute programs, I searched for materials from the internet, which were mostly in English" (Female, Malay, Teacher).*

*"There are few prevention programs in primary schools; only lots of tobacco prevention programs provided by the Ministry of Health that have many referrals. However, there is no training" (Female, Malay, Teacher).*

Different teachers, counsellors and implementers may treat students differently when there is no proper guidance they can refer to.

*"There are different treatments between counsellors and discipline teachers for students, so that makes students confused. I hope as the school teachers we can share the same frequency to educate our children" (Male, Malay, Teacher).*

Teachers felt that the approaches used in drug prevention programs need to be analyzed if they do not effectively help students avoid drug abuse problems.

*"Students only reach to the "know" level but have not yet reached to the "want" level. Therefore, certain methods are needed to provide awareness to students so that they are aware and want to stay away from drugs and view drugs as disgusting" (Male, Malay, Teacher).*

Teachers felt that the drug use prevention programs in their schools were not always evaluated effectively, and that the reports of their implementation in schools sometimes were questionable. Another challenge was that there was not always enough budget for drug use prevention programs.

*"The evaluation of the effectiveness of the drug prevention education program should not only be based on a written report sent immediately by the school unless there are certain criteria that determine that the school has successfully implemented the program. Reports given on a monthly basis are sometimes still questionable. The drug prevention education program conducted has not been studied as to whether it has been assessed or not. In addition, the implementation of drug prevention in schools also depends on the budget. If the budget is there, then the teacher will make a program, but if the budget is not there, then drug prevention does not work"* (Male, Malay, Teacher).

Teachers also were unsure about whether they really were being monitored during their implementation of drug use prevention programs. Being monitored helps to ensure that the implementers of a drug prevention education program do their job effectively.

*"School teachers get information and training, but we are not sure whether they are being monitored or not. The program is running, but monitoring is also necessary"* (Female, Malay, Teacher).

Involving other parties, especially parents, is crucial when implementing a drug use prevention education program. However, teachers have the challenges that some parents do not cooperate in combating the drug abuse problem.

*"Hmm... We still find that parents cannot accept that their children are found to be positive and they are less cooperative with the school. They find it hard to believe because they think that their children are the good boys at home"* (Female, Malay, Teacher).

*"Sometimes children have two personalities, at school and home. At school, students violate discipline, but at home, he or she acts as a good child hmm... so parents do not believe their child can be involved with such bad things. So I think, this drug, if we want to eliminate it completely, is difficult, but if it is possible to reduce. However, in preventing these problems, we need to work with all parties to reduce the case"* (Female, Malay, Teacher).

This study identified the features of existing drug use prevention education programs, besides identifying the perceptions, skills, and challenges among school teachers in areas at high-risk drug use. The existing drug prevention programs in primary school discussed in this study included drawing competitions, coloring, word-searches, poster making, advertising anti-drug information, quizzes, five-minutes-of anti-drugs message, talks, coaching clinics, PINTAR, and PROSIDAR. Other stakeholders were also involved in these programs, such as the Royal Malaysia Police (PDRM). PDRM helps in monitoring the schools in high-risk areas. The appearance of the police makes students try not to be involved in drug abuse. Besides, the Sahsiah Unggul Insan Terbilang (SUIT) module, which has only been implemented in the state of Perak, was developed to manage students who are involved in drug abuse problems. In terms of the perceptions and skills of teachers related to

implementation drug use prevention education programs, teachers in this study understood that cooperation with parents needs to be utilized effectively to combat drug abuse among students (Salim et al., 2010; Rosdianti et al., 2020). A WhatsApp group developed by teachers involving parents is an example of a good initiative used to foster cooperation with parents. The teachers in this study felt that parents should acknowledge the situation of their children at school, especially anything related to drug prevention education programs. In addition, the teachers felt that giving students early exposure to drug prevention is a good way to delay the onset of drug abuse among students (Cheung & Cheung, 2019; Handrianto et al., 2020; Steeger et al., 2023). Creating a standard operating procedure to be used with any of their students involved in drug abuse can help teachers manage problems systematically.

In terms of the challenges, the teachers' lack of proper guidance for implementing the prevention programs leads to different treatments of the teachers in dealing with drug use problems. Differing treatment can confuse students, which then will hinder the successful achievement of the targeted objectives (Hasibuan et al., 2020; Verovšek et al., 2021; Jamal et al., 2022). Some of the teachers in this study only were able to obtain guidance by searching for it on the internet. They were not sure whether the guidance they found was valid or not. Besides that, the teachers also lacked training in implementing prevention programs. Training helps teachers to implement programs as intended. The teachers in this study also felt that the approaches provided in drug use prevention education programs do not give a satisfactory result because the programs only inform students of the dangers of drug abuse but do not stop them from wanting to take drugs. Such kind of response showed that the contents or approaches in the drug prevention modules need to be re-evaluated (Muti'ah et al., 2021; Raffee et al., 2021). Other than that, the study showed that drug prevention programs are not evaluated comprehensively. The reports on program implementation submitted by schools to the authorities are questionable in terms of whether they are helpful in improving drug prevention programs or not. Also, the budget provided for such programs often seems inadequate for implementing them. Program implementation is contingent on sufficient funding. In addition, the teachers in this study were not sure whether they were being monitored, and they felt that it was difficult to implement drug use prevention programs effectively without being monitored. Finally, it is known that in drug use prevention programs, the cooperation of many parties is important. The challenges faced will be more difficult if the cooperation between school and parents is insufficient.

## **CONCLUSION**

The success of drug use prevention programs in schools is dependent upon the teachers' knowledge, skills, and attitudes about drug use issues. This article highlights the existing programs in Malaysian schools and the perceptions of teachers regarding the implementation of drug use prevention education in schools. This study reveals that there is a lot of work still to be done regarding the drug use education in high-risk areas in Malaysia. Teachers still face problems delivering drug messages in the teaching-learning process because they do not have enough materials or knowledge. Teachers' challenges arise not only from the school or educational policy but also from parents themselves. Hence, this study has provided important information to all interested parties that can be helpful when planning preventive programs for decreasing cases of drug abuse in schools. The government should conduct a comprehensive



assessment of existing drug education programs in Malaysian schools. It is also suggested that drug education should be more integrated into the school curriculum. In addition, the teachers' skills in drug use prevention education should be improved. Teachers may join trainings, seminars, workshops, and mentoring classes with an expert to increase their teaching competency and self-efficacy in drug use prevention education in schools. In addition, schools should involve parents in drug use prevention, so they will help take responsibility for preventing their children from using drugs.

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