

THE NON-FORMAL EDUCATION OF ORANG ASLI ADOLESCENTS IN MALAYSIA: FROM COMMUNITY TO UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

Even though the world has crossed into the next decade, non-formal education through community-based learning and other traditional learning avenues remains a powerful force in human lifespan development, especially for native peoples who possess thousands of years of local knowledge. Focusing on the Orang Asli (native peoples) of Malaysia, this empirical study was carried out to map the field before a more extensive research project is executed at the Royal Belum State Park in the state of Perak, Malaysia for the next two years. Six Orang Asli adolescents (three females and three males) from two local institutions of higher learning in Perak were interviewed individually and through focus group discussion sessions regarding their engagement with non-formal education within their own communities, from when they were much younger until they became tertiary level students. This study focuses on three permutations of non-formal education as operationalised by our research questions. First, as stories about the world around the participants that were told by elders in their communities and passed on from one generation to the next. Second, as first-hand experience on indigenous knowledge that is unique to their own communities and still practised by certain community members. And third, as a complementary form of education vis-à-vis the formal process of schooling, particularly for young Orang Asli children. 'Thick' qualitative data presented and discussed in this study deepen our understanding of non-formal education for and by the Orang Asli in Malaysia, as examined through contemporary lenses in a new decade of human history.

Keywords: adolescent development; community-based learning; indigenous knowledge; native peoples; non-formal education; qualitative research

INTRODUCTION

The issue of *Orang Asli* (native or literally ‘original peoples’) education has been raised time and again in contemporary Malaysia (see Chupil & C. Joseph, 2003; J. Joseph, 2008; Lye, 2001; Nah, 2008). Living off the land, oftentimes at the fringes of society and in remote areas of the virgin jungle of Peninsular Malaysia, access to quality education has been a problem for the diverse *Orang Asli* population since the years after Malaysia’s independence from colonial rule in 1957. Problems still exist in the here and now with reference to *Orang Asli* education, particularly the low formal educational attainment levels of some *Orang Asli* children and teenagers (see Abu Kassim & Adnan, 2005; Adnan & Saad, 2010; Adnan, 2010, 2012). Indeed, studies have shown that some *Orang Asli* teenagers prefer to find gainful employment or to do odd jobs rather than continuing their studies at secondary level right after completing their primary level education (see Mohd Salim, Adnan, Shah, Tahir & Yusof, 2020). This puts the *Orang Asli* population as a whole at a somewhat disadvantaged position within the intricate layers of modern Malaysian society and Malaysia’s march towards fully developed nation status (see Adnan & Smith, 2001, Adnan, 2011). Whilst there are success stories of *Orang Asli* children and teenagers within the school system, at the same time there are also accounts of *Orang Asli* dropouts and failures within Malaysian formal education (Shah, Adnan, Perumal, Yusof, Veeravagu & Kamarudin, 2020).

Due to these issues, some *Orang Asli* youngsters are viewed as underachievers and young people who do not show proclivities toward learning and formal education (Idrus, 2010). This common perception of *Orang Asli* youngsters is exacerbated by lack of access to quality formal education and other problems plaguing this uniquely diverse native community (Ghani, 2015), for example malnutrition and general health ailments, and the inability to continue their original ways of life due to their native lands being taken for development projects by the government and ruthless business entities alike (C. Joseph, 2008; Nah, 2008). Whilst there are many causes for the problems that continue to plague the lives of the *Orang Asli* in Malaysia that are out of the purview of this research paper, perhaps the most critical challenge facing the *Orang Asli* right now is for them to continue with their unique beliefs and customs but to still partake in the modernisation agenda of the government-of-the-day. At the other end of the spectrum, the government and also other stakeholders interested in the lives of the *Orang Asli* must also begin to develop a worldview that is uniquely *Orang Asli*; a worldview that appreciates and cherishes the unique lifestyle and traditions of the *Orang Asli*, for instance the importance of non-formal education within the daily lives of all members of the *Orang Asli* community.

LITERATURE REVIEW ON THE FOCUS AREAS

This section reviews research literature that is related to the focus areas of this study. It is divided into three subsections starting with the concept of non-formal education, the life of the *Orang Asli* in Malaysia and ending with *Orang Asli* education issues within contemporary Malaysia.

UNDERSTANDING THE CONSTRUCT OF NON-FORMAL EDUCATION

The term ‘non-formal education’ and its worldwide recognition came about in the 1960s, when centralized educational institutions were faced with an economic crisis and raised concerns regarding their lack of capacity to adapt to a new environment. A singular definition of non-formal education is difficult to construct. Coombs, Prosser and Ahmed (1973) in Carron and Carr-Hill

(1991) state that non-formal education consists of educational activities conducted outside the formal system and it is designed to serve recognizable clientele and educational objectives. On the other hand, according to Kedrayate (1997), informal education can be defined as a lifetime cycle through which a person acquires beliefs, principles, skills and knowledge through day-to-day practice, educational experiences and the tools of her or his community namely from his or her family and friends, the economy, library and the mass media. Non-formal learning activities are thus conducted in a flexible style of teaching with regards to the pace and length of instruction, the age groups of the learning community, and the quality and technique of learning. Hence, the ultimate goal is to offer those who experience it access to practical know-how that the society needs as compared to merely theoretical knowledge.

In addition, non-formal education is available for all genders, backgrounds and interests. It is also a fairly free type of education, with a range of teaching methods. Hussain (2014) states that non-formal education should be designed to meet the educational needs of children, due to the fact that this is necessary for their successful group functioning. Hence, it can be understood that non-formal education is generally viewed as an alternate form of education that is not constrained by age or an excessive formalism and plurality of objectives, purpose and meaning. This notion of non-formal education provides the skills that children aspire to gain for a better understanding of their own selves and their surroundings. It also allows them to deal with daily problems. Therefore, non-formal education is believed to be a practical solution to enhance the formal educational system. Sharma and Choudhary (2015) propose seven key features of non-formal learning to make a clear distinction between the formal and non-formal schooling process. The seven features are illustrated in Figure 1.

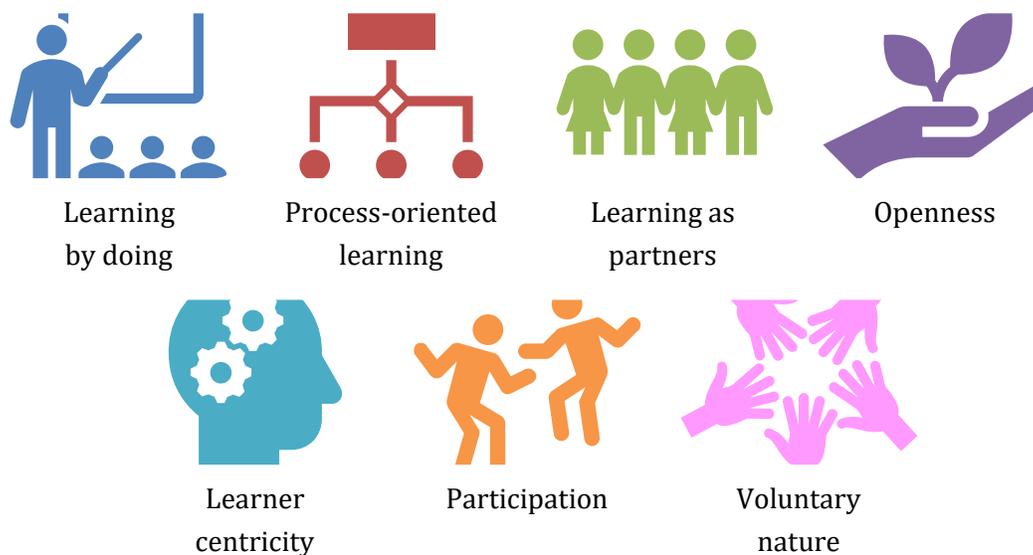


FIGURE 1. Seven key features of the process of non-formal learning

The first feature is learning by doing. The focus is on concrete actions such as taking on social responsibility rather than just learning theories or communicating through the teaching staff. The second feature is process-oriented learning. The process of learning can be adapted by learners throughout without focusing on the curriculum and duration of time. The third feature is learning as partners because non-formal education is focused on constructive collaborative approaches and

group-dynamic systems. The next feature is openness. This relates to the transparency of the non-formal education process that ensures one's own concepts must always be modified and re-evaluated and generally leads to several activities. Since topics and results are transparent and not subjective, this transparency paves the way for participants to engage actively in shaping learning experiences. Another feature is learner centricity. It relates to strategies and goals that are aimed at individual participants in non-formal education and tailored to their needs and interests as much as possible. The sixth feature is participation, whereby shared responsibility and self-determination are both goals in engaging with children and young people, as well as an essential pedagogical way of operating. The seventh and last feature of non-formal learning is its voluntary nature. The participation of the child is not statutory, and parents can therefore freely decide to take advantage of what is offered or not depending on their preferences. Based on these seven features, it can be concluded that the non-formal classification covers a wide range of educational systems with characteristics that contribute either to or away from the established formal systems in place.

THE 'ORANG ASLI' AS A DIVERSE MINORITY GROUP IN MALAYSIA

The Orang Asli is the original or native ethnic minority population of the Malaysian Peninsula. 'Orang Asli' refers to original or primitive peoples composed of 18 sub-ethnic groups generally classified under Negrito, Senoi, and Proto-Malay for official purposes (Jamiran & Seow, 2013) with 133,755 total population count (see Ang, Leow, Yeap, Hood, Mahani & Md-Zain, 2011). However, Benjamin (2002) as cited in Ghani (2015) classified the Orang Asli under four broad categories according to the ethnic language that they use. The groups are the Northern Aslian (the Jahaic), the Central Aslian (the Senoic), the Jah Hut and the Southern Aslian (the Semelaic).

The Senoi are Malaysia's largest group of Orang Asli. They account for about 56% of the total population of the Orang Asli community. Their subgroups are found mainly in central Pahang (Jah Hut and Che Wong), Coastal Selangor (Mah Meri) and in south-eastern Pahang (Semoq Beri) and also in the states of Perak, Pahang and Kelantan (Semai and Temiar). Some sub-groups rely on the forest for sustenance through foraging, yet others have started permanent farms, as well as work on wage-related activities. On the other hand, the Semai is a semi-sedentary ethnic group in central South-Eastern Asia on the Malay Peninsula and they are known particularly for their non-violent ways. They are also known as the Mai Semai or Orang Dalam. Their language has been influenced by various languages for instance Mon, Khmer, Thai and Malay. The indigenous Orang Asli population have distinctive belief systems, systems of culture and values. At the same time, they possess valuable knowledge in sustainable natural resources management due to their affinity with the jungle.

It is believed that Orang Asli communities did not originate from the same origins based on the historiography of the Malaysian community and the Orang Asli community. The Orang Asli is a Neolithic nomadic tribe from Africa across the globe that originated from the Negrito group about 40,000 years ago, whilst the Malayan people originated from the Yunan Highlands in Southern China (see N. Shah, Rus, Mustapha, Hussain & Wahab, 2018). In the past thousands of years, the migration path of nomadic cultures from northern Europe to Australia through the Malay Peninsular had been based on similar remnants of historical artefacts left behind on many continents. Due to this long history, Malaysia has accepted the Orang Asli as part of the *Bumiputera* community and preserves their rights under the Aboriginal Peoples Act (1954, revised 1974) and The Malaysian Federal Constitution (1957). The government of Malaysia also set up the Department of Orang Asli Affairs (JAKOA) in 1953, under the Ministry of Rural

Development, to oversee the affairs of the diverse Orang Asli population. JAKOA organizes many projects to build and improve the social mobility and social welfare of the Orang Asli population such as through health programs to improve access to healthcare and also education programs to improve their job skills. JAKOA is also responsible to maintain the uniqueness of Orang Asli identity, culture and heritage in Malaysia

ORANG ASLI EDUCATION ISSUE IN THE MALAYSIAN CONTEXT

As aforementioned, the overall educational attainment of the Orang Asli as an indigenous ethnic group in Malaysia is still generally low and the number of Orang Asli children and teenagers dropping out from primary and secondary schools are still high in 2019. Most of the members of the Orang Asli community receive formal education only at the primary level. There is, moreover, a significant trend where most Orang Asli students who finished their primary education are choosing to not continue their studies at secondary level. This is due mainly to their lack of awareness regarding formal education and their somewhat low socioeconomic status. The factors are hindering concerted efforts to ensure that Orang Asli children and teenagers receive quality educational provisions (Aini, Don & Isa, 2019). At the same time, such problems are commonly associated with several other factors, for example inconducive school environment including teaching and learning issues and also lack of motivation on the importance of education from the surrounding community (Lambin, Abdul Wahab, Swee Choo, Mustapha & Abdullah, 2018). This is parallel with the study by Rabahi, Yusof and Awang (2016) who found that the reasons for Orang Asli children to drop out from school are lack of interest in schooling, negative attitudes toward formal learning, having to live in poverty, lack of support from schools, lack of awareness amongst parents, inconducive school environment and sociocultural climate. Hence, we can argue that some members of the Orang Asli community do not have a positive feeling regarding education. In addition, some of them do not believe that education is important to their lives and to their families.

However, there are also members of the Orang Asli community who feel that schooling is an effective way to alleviate their deprivation and to help them break out from the cycle of poverty. For children and teenagers from these Orang Asli families, the school is a place where they experience many things for the first time. Indeed, research has shown that it is only when Orang Asli children attend school that they experience the sense of being different that can either be perceived positively or more commonly, negatively (Nordin, Hassan & Danjuma, 2018). One of the Orang Asli participants in that study shared that she enjoyed schooling because she had made many friends. In school, Orang Asli youngsters can carry out various activities together, for example singing songs, playing musical instruments, drawing shapes and writing the alphabets or *Jawi* scripts (Rabahi, Yusof & Awang, 2016). Another participant recounted how her mother started to realize that formal schooling and formal education can transform an individual's future. This Orang Asli mother had high expectations of her child. So, following her husband's death two weeks after her child's birth, she tried to ensure that her child did not miss kindergarten classes and ensuing school years. The mother then moved to a place which was nearby the school and worked as a farmer there. The mother then received basic learning materials at home, such as coloured pencils, and she began daily routines to encourage and promote the learning of her daughter. Her directed initiatives show that parental involvement not only enhances academic performance, but it also has a positive influence on student attitude and behaviour regardless of ethnic group. Without a shadow of doubt, parental involvement and encouragement in a child's

education will affect the child's approach to learning, classroom performance, self-esteem, absenteeism and motivation (see Adnan, 2009).

Looking at the broader picture, according to the then Malaysian Deputy Minister of Rural and Regional Development, Ahmad Jazlan Yaakub, the number of Orang Asli adolescents who attended local Teacher Education Institutes during the same period was 53. Furthermore, about 5,000 Orang Asli adolescents have advanced their education to public higher education institutions (*IPTA*) between year 2010 to year 2018. These statistics show that the Orang Asli community are competitive and comparable in terms of educational attainment with the urban communities of Malaysia. So, instead of focusing on the customs and way-of-life of the Orang Asli population that might disadvantage them within the context of a developing nation, we should also look at how facets of those customs and traditions contribute to the unique worldview of Orang Asli children, teenagers and adolescents. One of those facets is the important position of non-formal education within the lives of Orang Asli youngsters.

BACKGROUND OF RESEARCH AND METHODOLOGY SELECTED

Six Orang Asli adolescents (three females and three males) from two institutions of higher learning in Perak were interviewed individually and through focus group discussion sessions regarding their experience with non-formal education or learning within their own unique communities, from when they were much younger until they became tertiary level students. To limit the coverage of this study, we focused on three ways in which non-formal education or learning is experienced by the research participants. First, as stories about the world around them that were told by elders in their communities and passed on from one generation to the next. Second, as first-hand experience on indigenous knowledge that is unique to their own communities and is still practised by certain community members. And third, as a complementary form of education vis-à-vis the formal process of schooling, particularly for young Orang Asli children.

Data were gathered in the beginning of year 2020 and the whole process only took two weeks to complete due to the fact that this study is meant to only 'map the field' as it were, before a more extensive, longitudinal research effort is carried out for the next two years. As such, open protocols were used with open questions seeking open answers to deepen our understanding of non-formal education for and by the Orang Asli in the Malaysian context, as examined through contemporary lenses in a new decade of human history. The data collected are organised based on themes and sub-themes, and data analysis happened during the process of data collection as is norm with qualitative and ethnographic empirical research efforts. The names of the participants have been changed to protect their real identities. The comments and quotations shared in the next section were minimally edited so as to present the actual ideas and preserve the ideological nuances by the participants.

PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH DATA AND ANALYSIS

As aforementioned, this research project employed two qualitative instruments to collect 'thick' data namely interviews and focus group discussions. These were conducted with participants from the selected research sites consisting pre-diploma and diploma students in the state of Perak, Malaysia. All of the participants are from the *Semai* ethnic background, living in the state of Perak.



FIGURE 2. Three core themes emerging from the study

The data collected highlight the influence of non-formal education on the overall learning process the Orang Asli community members; the data also show the links between local knowledge (i.e., Orang Asli native knowledge) and formal education through the process of schooling. Three core themes emerging from the study are depicted in Figure 2 and these are presented with examples in the following sub-sections.

INFLUENCE OF ORANG ASLI FAMILIES ON NON-FORMAL EDUCATION/LEARNING

Throughout recent decades, non-formal education has been suggested as becoming increasingly important. Considering that the goals of non-formal education are broad and diverse, there is a wide range of non-formal learning activities available for Orang Asli children and teenagers. As ‘Jani’ puts it, “When it comes to learning I guess all peoples are the same, everything will start in the family. For us Semai people, it’s the same too. We learn all the good values and knowledge from our families first.” As a Diploma in Computer Science student, Jani believes that in general all Orang Asli families, regardless of ethnic group, view the process of formal schooling in positive light. However, access to formal learning is sometimes hard for them leading to many of his peers dropping out from school. At the same time, all of our participants generally have a positive outlook on formal education and formal learning. Being tertiary level students, they are very much interested in education and they aspire to have a good career through the process of formal education.

As for ‘Rina’ from an Orang Asli village in Slim River, Perak, she started her education from home when she was still a little girl. According to Rina, there are many Orang Asli families who still live in rural areas as subsistence farmers who practice diversified agriculture and often a form of rotational farming combined with wet paddy, tapioca, fruit and vegetables. And so, in her family, her mother taught Rina the traditional ways to plant and pick vegetables. She shares her early experience as someone who lives from the land: “My mother, she taught me to plant different vegetables and to fish too. Basically, we are very experienced in doing those things. Everyone needs to eat right?” She knows how to fish efficiently because her father used to bring her to the river and showed her the many ways to fish. In her village, Rina’s people mainly engage in fishing, together with cultivation of vegetables and edible plants for their own consumption. Living in harmony with nature and taking care of the world around her was one of the earliest non-formal lessons taught to her by her parents.

Still, Jani and Rina together with the other participants in this study realized that schooling must also play an important role in their lives. They are quite lucky because all of their parents

gave them the opportunity to go to school, to continue schooling and to complete the schooling process. Not all families in their respective villages gave the same support to the younger generation. 'Sarah' from an Orang Asli village in Tapah, Perak recounts how her parents "pushed" her to go to school. Her parents said that in school, she will get a lot of knowledge that her parents cannot teach. "So, I go to school so that I can learn how to read, write and count even though my parents didn't even finish their primary level schooling. Book learning is important for my future career," Sarah professes. She adds:

Being an Orang Asli person isn't easy. Other people like to bully us. So, my village elders they made sure all the families send all the kids to go to school, to learn to read. ... This is to prevent us from getting tricked to sell our lands because outsiders always try to bribe and trick us to get our lands. They then destroy all our native lands for commercial profit. So, our grandfathers and grandmothers asked us to go to school so that we can read. There are so many people who want to take our lands. Since now we can read, we can understand the agreements written.

As mentioned above, tragically not all Orang Asli families understand that formal education can change the lives of their children for the better and they only rely on the process of non-formal learning to impart knowledge within their communities. According to Rina, there are still many Orang Asli children who are not sent to school because their parents are afraid of the outside world. She shared that her mother had the same thought at the first place but because she would like Rina to be educated and further her study to change their life, her mother tried so hard to overcome the feeling. Her mother was very positive to send her to school even though she is worried that one day Rina might lose her identity as a *Semai* girl. Rina continues, "Even now, my mother will always be worried because she is afraid that somebody will kidnap us *Semai* youngsters and maybe even kill us!" Negative perceptions about outsiders is not uncommon to the Orang Asli population. 'Mikel' recounts his own experience:

You can't blame us Orang Asli is we don't trust people easily. In my village, even the government officers trick us to take our lands and destroy our farms. They say "this is not your land", but we've been here since how many hundred years? So, some parents they don't like their children to go to school. The kids just stay home and learn about farming, making huts, finding food off the land, you know all the traditional things. But these things won't make us [the *Semai* people] modern. We also need new knowledge, modern knowledge so that our people will become richer and stronger. I feel sad for my own people, but many outsiders actually make life hard for us. This is the reality.

At the same time, according to Sarah, some of the parents from her village could not afford to send their children to school because they have a lot of other children to care for. Most of these families are single parent families; they are mostly single mothers who need to undertake the arduous task to raise many children on their own. Sara emphatically explains:

When the children have co-curriculum activities in the afternoon, it's going to be extremely difficult for the mother to concentrate on the things she is doing and to take care of the little siblings. So, who is going to take care of other younger siblings if the mother needs to go pick up that child in school? In order to lessen that stress, the mother just gives up on

schooling that child. She has to let go of her children's formal education because she doesn't want to burn out and she still must put food on the table. The family just relies on informal education to get by, and the cycle continues and continues. Like this, when will our community improve?

ORANG ASLI LOCAL KNOWLEDGE AND NON-FORMAL EDUCATION/LEARNING

Local knowledge is simply the knowledge that has developed over time from people who live in a certain location. It is also often referred to as indigenous knowledge or traditional knowledge. Local knowledge is a combination of old knowledge and new knowledge that some people acquire from other people, from other cultures and from engaging with the immediate environment around them. Sarah, during the interview, shares that her grandmother taught her about treating fractured bones using creeping plants in the jungle. When she was a child, she experienced this first-hand by looking at her grandmother treating her cousin who was involved in an accident and his foot was broken. The cousin was sent to the hospital; however, the healing process took a long time. Hence, her grandmother asked her to find these creeping plants (she cannot remember the names of the plants). The creeping plants were used as a brace to support, align or hold a body part in the correct position. Sarah explains, "My grandmother wrapped my cousin's foot with the plants. It really helped to support his foot. The procedure was to bring the foot back to its correct position. ... My cousin was healed in less than a week!"

Sarah mentions a news item in Gua Musang, Kelantan where seven Orang Asli children ran out of their school into the jungle. The children managed to survive because they had learned the survival skills taught to them by their families and community members. This proves that living with nature using traditional methods can help the Orang Asli to survive its harsh conditions. Through the practice of non-formal education, Orang Asli elders still continue to teach their young about survival skills through the knowledge of plants, animals and geology of their surroundings. In the process, Orang Asli children and teenagers can learn to appreciate the utility of various plant species, including the activities and patterns of the animal species inhabiting the local area. Their awareness of their surroundings is also enhanced when they can pay attention to geological characteristics, which tell them where water and other resources are likely to be. 'Che Senik' recounts his own experience, living in a village in Gerik, Perak:

My late father was a great Army tracker and also a hunter. I think as soon as the first time I learned to walk, I was already taught about animal tracks and plants and magic things you're not supposed to do in the jungle. When I was a bit bigger, my father would take me hunting. I learned so many things you can't learn from the textbooks. This is the richness of Orang Asli tradition. But now, now many of our young people are starting to forget this. But, they're also lazy to go to school. ... They are trapped in nowhere! They don't have the Orang Asli knowledge, but they also don't have the book knowledge from school. What will happen to them in future?

ORANG ASLI ATTITUDES & BEHAVIOURS TOWARD NON-FORMAL EDUCATION/LEARNING

It goes without saying that this empirical research is not a representative document of all the Orang Asli communities scattered in Peninsular Malaysia. At the same time, the picture being painted

regarding Orang Asli education is not a particularly positive one as the quote from Che Senik serves to highlight. Some Orang Asli youngsters are not only losing sight of the importance of their local knowledge and traditions, they are also being disenfranchised from modernity due to their reluctance to learn formally from the national schooling system. It is true that access to quality formal education or schooling has always been a bane in the lives of the Orang Asli peoples of Malaysia. That being said, the situation has been getting better since the years after Malaysia's independence from colonial rule.

For the six participants in this study, they are perhaps very lucky to come from supportive parents, families and communities who understand the importance of "book knowledge" that can only come from primary and secondary schooling up to college and university. The participants' experiences also show that local knowledge does not have to go against book knowledge, and both can and should co-exist together within the hearts and minds of Orang Asli children and teenagers. As 'Ning' the third female participant argues:

It's easy to say we Orang Asli peoples don't like to learn, we're lazy or that we're all just stupid. Even in school, some of my teachers easily just blame us like that. Yes, some [Orang Asli] youngsters are just hopeless but other races are also like that, right? Even in the Western countries the problem is like that. At the same time, many Orang Asli peoples understand the need to be modern, to find modern jobs but still take care of the jungle, the plants and the animals. This, for me, is our peoples' greatest strength. We can be modern, but we also take care of the world. Not like the rich, modern people who just take and take from the land then destroy everything, until we get environmental problems like global warming and other problems.

All of the participants believe that their positive attitudes helped to motivate them to learn beyond non-formal education within their families and communities. Of course, being young and energetic they are still interested in having fun and fitting in the community because they believe learning and continuing their studies is needed for a healthy and enjoyable life in the future. Their parents and families continue to be supportive by putting their children's needs first. Sarah's comment summarises this crux of this sub-section:

I always wanted to learn because so few Orang Asli children will further their study in IPT [colleges and universities]. Now, at university, when I go to class, I will always focus and try to learn as much new knowledge as I can. I struggle a lot actually, but I don't easily give up because I have my own dreams, my own ambitions for the future. When I was a little girl, my father taught me Bahasa Melayu, Maths and also English even though he is also not too good in learning. Because of him pushing me and pushing me, now I know so much more than just to read and to count.

CONCLUSION

The data in this empirical research paper show the importance of non-formal education in the lives of Orang Asli children and teenagers. Even though the failures of Orang Asli youngsters within the Malaysian education system have been well documented, it is a common misconception that *all* Orang Asli youngsters do not like to learn or that they are just plain lazy. Data in the preceding section show that the Orang Asli make a distinction between their local and traditional knowledge

with ‘book knowledge’ from the process of schooling and formal education. Even more interesting, at least for the participants in this research, they argue that a combination of non-formal education and formal education only serves to make them better individuals with stronger morals and values compared to people with book knowledge who only want to take advantage of everything to become rich and to destroy our world in the process.

Even more critical for future researchers, the issues raised and the stories shared by the participants in this empirical research open up more avenues for empirical inquiry with reference to the process of non-formal education and learning, and how these contribute to the lives of Orang Asli children and teenagers in year 2020 and beyond. The issues raised and the stories shared within this empirical paper must be explored and studied further by relevant stakeholders not just to ensure the survival of Orang Asli cultures and traditions but more importantly to guarantee the prosperity of Orang Asli peoples within the rapidly developing nation that is Malaysia.

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