

THE ORANG ASLI IN MALAYSIAN FORMAL EDUCATION: ORANG ASLI TEACHERS' SENTIMENTS AND OBSERVATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Stories of native peoples being disenfranchised from modern life and being disadvantaged within different social spheres from the realm of formal education to the world of work are nothing new. Even in developed nations, some native peoples find it hard to adjust to the lifestyles of the majority population, what more within developing countries where the sense of social justice is low and native peoples are left to fend for themselves in the name of development and modernity. Centring on the Orang Asli population of Malaysia, this qualitative research was carried out to map the field before a large-scale academic inquiry is executed at the Royal Belum State Park in the state of Perak, Malaysia for the following two years. Four Orang Asli teachers in the state of Perak were individually interviewed to collect 'thick' qualitative data regarding the current state of the Orang Asli population in formal education (i.e., in primary and secondary schools). This research is very much interested in three core subject matters. Firstly, how formal education and the process of schooling play a part in the lives of Orang Asli children and teenagers. Secondly, what should teachers and other educators do to ensure that Orang Asli children and teenagers benefit as much as they could from their primary and secondary schooling. And finally, where is the place of non-formal or informal education within the lifespan development of Orang Asli children and teenagers, as they face increasing challenges to maintain their traditional way of life and living.

Keywords: formal schooling; informal education; lifespan development; native peoples; qualitative research; teaching and learning

INTRODUCTION

Teachers are critical to the process of nation building (Adnan & Smith, 2001), and they are the core conduits of the process of formal learning whether in underdeveloped, developing or developed situations around the globe (Martin, 2007; Richardson, 1997; Sharma & Choudhary, 2015). Formal education or learning is different from learning in non-formal contexts (Valli & Buese, 2007); formal education takes place in kindergartens, schools, colleges and universities (Shah, Adnan, Perumal, Yusof, Veeravagu & Kamarudin, 2020). The process of formal education also takes onboard the notion of assessment and evaluation to ensure that there will be formal reporting on the progress of learners from one level or standard to the next. Formal reporting in formal education ensures that broad educational attainment standards are met and that learners are ready to progress from foundation educational levels to more complex ones, as they mature and age (Valiente, Swanson, DeLay, Fraser & Parker, 2020). At the other end of the spectrum, non-formal education refers to teaching and learning that happens at home, within families, with friends and within the community around us (Shah, Adnan, Mohd Salim, Yusof & Tahir, 2020). Together, both non-formal and formal education lead to the construction of the whole person, an individual who is ready to contribute and give back to society in a positive matter (Adnan, 2009).

Only teachers can really develop nations, not politicians or any other stakeholders who typically have their own personal agendas that are oftentimes not aligned to the national vision of a nation and are sometimes more in tune with their personal gains. In fact, politicians who cross into the realm of education only bring chaos and distract us from the important actions to be taken to improve the experience of teaching and learning within society (Fullan, 1993). Teachers, on the other hand, do all that they can to instruct the next generation of citizens so that these citizens can become agents of change regardless of gender, religion, ethnic or socioeconomic group (see Fullan, 2002; Sparks, 2003). Such is the importance of the roles of teachers in modern society that this empirical research effort takes up the challenge to study two critical constructs in the Malaysian context: The experience of *Orang Asli* (natives or ‘original peoples’ of Malaysia) youngsters within the process of formal education together with the experience of *Orang Asli* teachers in teaching these youngsters in primary and secondary schools within the borders of Peninsular Malaysia.

REVIEW OF RELEVANT RESEARCH LITERATURE

This section reviews literature from research related to the focus areas of this study. It is divided into three subsections. The first reviews research literature on formal education and issues of access to quality education for *Orang Asli* youngsters. The second subsection examines initiatives to help *Orang Asli* youngsters move from non-formal education to future-oriented formal education. The last subsection deals with emotional and physical pressures that *Orang Asli* youngsters continue to face in Malaysian primary and secondary schools. This section ends with a summary of all the key points covered.

FORMAL EDUCATION & ACCESS TO QUALITY EDUCATION FOR ORANG ASLI YOUNGSTERS

Providing the *Orang Asli* with quality formal education has always been a critical issue especially in the Malaysian scenario since the years after the country became independent from colonial rule

in 1957 (see Adnan, 2010, 2011, 2012). One of the typical dilemmas that are faced by the Orang Asli is lack of quality education and living far away from good educational facilities (The New Straits Times, 2019). Despite advancements in technologies of teaching and learning, quality formal education is still distant to some Orang Asli children and teenagers who are still not able to gain access to state-of-the-art teaching and learning experiences due to the remoteness of some Orang Asli settlements. For instance, The New Straits Times (2019) reported that in one case, the range between one of the settlements in Sungai Koyan in the state of Pahang, Malaysia to the nearest primary school which is *Sekolah Kebangsaan Pos Cenderoh* (or Pos Cenderoh National School) is 25 kilometres, each way. Without a shred of doubt, traveling will indeed take a toll out of Orang Asli children on a day-to-day basis and is nigh impossible under these difficult logistical circumstances.

Although numerous efforts have been showcased by the Government, the private sector and NGOs, many Orang Asli children and teenagers decide to drop formal education halfway due to different reasons such as staying far away from these educational facilities and the fact that most of them are more accustomed to their forefather's lifestyle such as hunting (Endicott, 2016), fishing and harvesting forest produce (The New Straits Times, 2019). In 2018, Renganathan reports that the Orang Asli are also fearful of engaging with 'outside' educational methods; the paradigm shift from an oral traditional style of non-formal education to a recorded literacy style of education is perhaps too unfamiliar for some of them to accept. In addition, several studies have shown that some Orang Asli children and teenagers do not understand basic educational concepts and issues, and they lag behind learners from the Malaysian majority ethnic groups due to problems of poverty and limited access to schools in the surrounding area (see Abu Kassim & Adnan, 2005; Adnan & Saad, 2010; Renganathan, 2018).

FROM NON-FORMAL TO FUTURE-ORIENTED FORMAL EDUCATION FOR THE ORANG ASLI

These complications have indeed slowed down the speed of progress and those who choose to teach the Orang Asli peoples need to equip themselves with the necessary knowledge and deeper exposure to Orang Asli beliefs, custom and traditions. Renganathan (2018) suggests that to face and counter such problems, teachers and those who volunteer to teach Orang Asli children and teenagers need to embrace cultural differences in their pedagogical approaches in teaching to learning together with the students. Instead of the educators merely deploying the common top to bottom teaching method, they need to practice a bottom-up approach; in other words, they need foremost to learn to understand the nature and the lifestyles of the diverse Orang Asli population, and to win their hearts and minds so that the Orang Asli will take part in the Malaysian formal education system (Diah, 2014). According to Jegatesen (2019), to embrace these cultural differences, the 'outsider' teachers and volunteers need to understand and learn the cultures and lifestyles of the Orang Asli, instead of 'pushing' the Orang Asli to learn more about life in the city. One of the Orang Asli respondents interviewed by Jegatesen (2019) suggests that:

Well, one of the reasons is that if at all possible, I want them to know what Orang Asli customs and belief systems are. So, at least when they know, they can 'feel' it – just like I felt it when I was a child. Only then would they be able to free their minds [from the city]. This is [also] so they know their [our] identity as Orang Asli. (p. 57)

In the same line of argument, another Orang Asli representative also shared his thoughts on the current situation facing the Orang Asli as a whole. He argues:

We want them to know the culture of the [Orang Asli] *kampung*. Because the people of the village, they [we] already know the city... but the people from the city, they do not know anything about our village. This is why we need to expose them [to life] at the village. (Jegatesen, 2019, p. 57)

Based on the given scenario, teaching the Orang Asli is quite a delicate matter as ‘outside’ educators need to equip the Orang Asli with formal education within and through the Orang Asli’s unique cultural context instead of impressing upon them the ways of city folks, as it were (see Lye, 2001; Nah, 2008; Shah, Rus, Mustapha, Hussain & Wahab, 2018).

The requests made by the Orang Asli in Jegatesen’s report is very much related to the concept of identity. Instead of embracing modern life and migrating to the city, the Orang Asli intend to bring the city into their traditional territories. This is a clear act of preservation made by the Orang Asli. Based on this precept, harmony can be achieved if city folks learn about the Orang Asli first, instead of vice versa. The act of cultural preservation and identity preservation is discussed by Homi Bhabha in Robson (2020), suggesting that a tribe relies on their sense of identity on the exclusion of others if not the identity will become difficult to discern and will be threatened. Therefore, Malaysian teachers must consider their approach before blindly bringing external influences upon the Orang Asli to have better success rates in standardised testing and evaluation regimes. In this context, a more sophisticated style of education must be explored and utilized, and such effort is aligned with the idea of ‘Society 5.0’. As suggested by Salgues (2018) Society 5.0 is a, “Society of intelligence in which physical space and cyberspace are strongly integrated” (p. 1). The integration of these two elements permits teachers to explore the needs of Orang Asli children and teenagers not just by engaging with them physically but also to help them achieve in-depth knowledge through reading online articles, watching online videos, and also playing online learning games that are relevant to the lives of the Orang Asli.

Likewise, professional teachers and teaching volunteers should also learn and equip themselves with a variety of teaching methods and materials to cater to the real needs of Orang Asli children and teenagers. Although there will be possibilities of practical constraints such as Internet downtime and not enough gadgets, the educators can and should equip themselves with the necessary pedagogical skills and knowledge to teach Orang Asli children and teenagers. Such an effort in utilizing technology in everyday teaching and learning is strongly linked to Industrial Revolution 4.0 and the realization of ‘Super Smart Societies’ (see Adnan, 2018; Adnan, Karim, Tahir, Mustafa Kamal & Yusof, 2019; Adnan, Ya Shak, Karim, Tahir & Shah, 2020).

EMOTIONAL & PHYSICAL PRESSURE ON ORANG ASLI YOUNGSTERS IN MALAYSIAN SCHOOLS

Pedagogical approaches and remote locations are not the only predicaments concerning formal education and the diverse Orang Asli communities in Malaysia. Vengadesan (2019) reports that some Orang Asli children who display interest in formal education and learning in schools have been allegedly bullied, outcast and ridiculed by local students from other majority Malaysian ethnic groups. Even some teachers are involved in taunting Orang Asli children and teenagers: “One Orang Asli woman recalled how a teacher called her ‘orangutan’ while another said she was

told by a teacher that it was easier to teach a monkey than an Orang Asli child” (Vengadesan, 2019, online). True enough, Endicott (2016) argues that the bullying and ridiculing of the Orang Asli students in multi-ethnic schools in Malaysia is a never-ending story, and merely ignoring the negative comments and behaviours are not going to stop the emotional and physical distress facing Orang Asli youngsters. Dismissing what is happening is not the best solution to curb the bullying of Orang Asli students in Malaysian schools. Of course, the government-of-the-day is trying to improve and streamline the laws regarding bullying and discrimination in the education sector. The Malaysian government is concerned with hammering down the hammer of justice on these criminals in order to create a safe and healthy environment for all students in Malaysia, regardless of their skin colours and ethnic backgrounds (see MalaysiaKini, 2017). With the seemingly never-ending recurrence of such terrible episodes, Malaysian teachers must harbour a good intention to truly improve the lives of their Orang Asli students.

As Rabahi, Yusof and Awang (2016) observe, language also plays an important role as the missing link to forge connections and understanding between Orang Asli children and the outsider teachers or volunteer educators. As Hashim and Abdul Majeed (2013) note, there are many Orang Asli tribes and each of the tribes has their unique language and belief systems, for example the Orang Asli tribesmen such as the Semelai, Mah Meri, Jahai and Batek. At the same time, the Orang Asli has a long-term relationship with the majority *Bumiputera* Malays ethnic group and has retained some of the Malay language since both ethnic groups have forged a good relationship for many hundred years. Unfortunately, there are also Orang Asli tribes that live in isolation because their styles of living and economic methods are self-sufficient in nature, making the needs to interact with external parties or between tribes non-pressing (Hashim & Abdul Majeed, 2013). Such situations will eventually cause problems for both ethnic groups to understand and learn from and through each other’s languages. Nasr and Farooqui (2015) advocate that efforts have to be continuously made to learn the languages and cultures of the Orang Asli by the majority population and one of the initiatives taken is to broadcast the Orang Asli cultural lifestyle and folk songs through Malaysian radio broadcasts such as *Asyik FM*. Nasr and Farooqui (2015) further suggest that the broadcasting must involve the two largest Orang Asli tribes which are the Semai and the Temiar. At this moment in time, that radio channel also broadcasts in the languages of other tribes such as the Temuang and Jakun. To date, *Asyik FM* radio programming has been broadcasting more than 1,000 Orang Asli songs; running sharing sessions on aspects of well-being, education, agriculture, forest gathering and traditional festivals mediated by the Department of Orang Asli Development (JHEOA); and also doing talk shows that focus on further improving the living standards of the Orang Asli in Malaysia as a whole.

SUMMARY OF THIS SECTION

To summarise this literature review section, teething issues such as lack of educational facilities, weaknesses in pedagogical approaches, bullying and language barriers are common stumbling blocks to improve the lives of the diverse Orang Asli population in Peninsular Malaysia. As the world changes, the jungle begins to slowly disappear to cater to the needs of the increasing number of the Malaysian population. The disappearance of virgin jungle areas has become a great threat to the Orang Asli peoples and formal education is perhaps one of the best ways forward to cope with rapid social and environmental changes. Other critical issues that are related to the Orang Asli as emphasized by Rabahi, Yusof and Awang (2016) are “lack of interest in schooling, negative attitudes, poverty, policy implementation failure, low accessibility and parental involvement,

curriculum, pedagogical skills, quality of leadership of school administrators, school climate, and social-cultural milieu of the Orang Asli society” (p. 121). Indisputably, together we must rethink the strategies to help save yet improve the lifestyle of the Orang Asli (Nasr & Farooqui, 2015).

BACKGROUND OF THIS EMPIRICAL STUDY AND ITS METHODOLOGY

Four teachers of Orang Asli descent (three females and one male) from four schools in the state of Perak were interviewed individually to provide data for this empirical study. They were chosen based on availability and contact details were provided by our close contacts. The three female teachers are currently based in primary schools whilst the sole male teacher in the group is currently teaching in a secondary school. The youngest teacher in the group is 34 years old whilst the eldest (the male teacher) is 53 years old. All of the participants were trained at Malaysian teacher’s training colleges all over the country; academic-wise, they possess teaching diplomas and first degrees, and some of them are also holders of Master’s degrees that they self-funded from their salaries as teachers. Figure 1 provides further details about our research participants (i.e., the Orang Asli teachers).

In late 2019 and early 2020, the four teachers were individually interviewed to collect ‘thick’ qualitative data regarding the current state of the Orang Asli population in formal education (i.e., in primary and secondary schools). This research is very much interested in three core subject matters that we have operationalised as three separate research questions. **First:** How does formal education and the process of schooling play a part in the lives of Orang Asli children and teenagers? **Second:** What should teachers do to ensure that Orang Asli children and teenagers benefit as much as they could from their primary and secondary schooling? **Third:** Where is the place of non-formal or informal education within the lifespan development of Orang Asli children and teenagers?

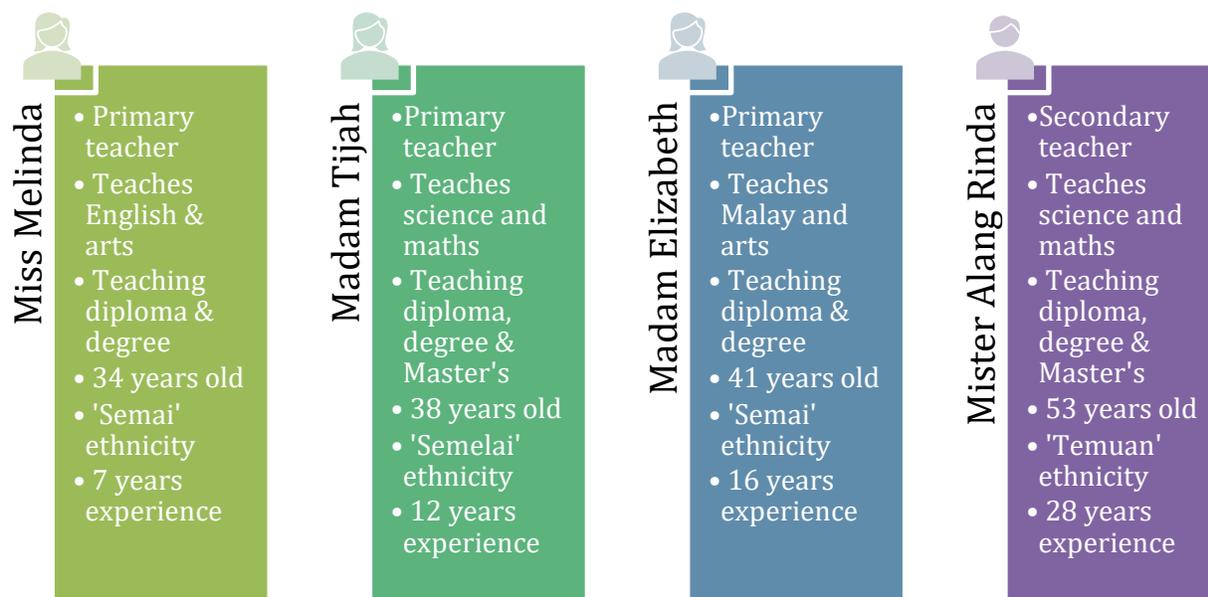


FIGURE 1. Information about the four research participants in this qualitative empirical inquiry

Data were gathered in late 2019 and early 2020, and the whole process took nearly two months to finish. Interviews were conducted off-site during non-working hours, so as not to disturb the normal work responsibilities of the participants. This study is meant to ‘map the field’ as it were, before a more widespread, longitudinal research project is carried out for the next two years. Open interview protocols were used to seek open answers to build our understanding of issues related to Orang Asli youngsters in Malaysian formal education, from the experiences and observations of their Orang Asli teachers. The data we collected were then organised based on themes and sub-themes; data analysis happened concurrently during data collection as is norm with ethnographic and fully qualitative research projects. Names of the participants below have been anonymised to protect their identities.

RESEARCH DATA PRESENTATION AND DATA ANALYSIS

This research project employed face-to-face open-ended interviews to collect thick data from the participants. The interviews, as mentioned in the last section, were conducted with research participants / schoolteachers from four government-funded schools (three primary and one secondary) in the state of Perak, Malaysia. The data collected are all related to our three research questions. The research questions are interested in how formal education and the process of schooling play a role in the lives of Orang Asli children and teenagers, what teachers should do to ensure that Orang Asli children and teenagers benefit as much as they could from their primary and secondary schooling, and lastly where is the place of non-formal or informal education within the lifespan development of Orang Asli children and teenagers.

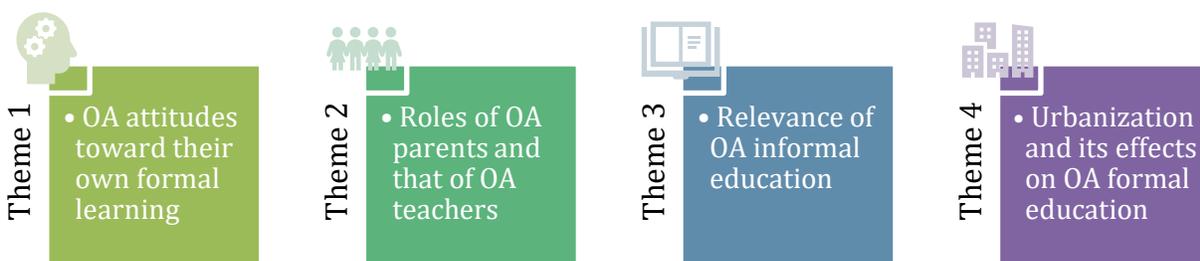


FIGURE 2. Four core and salient themes emerging from the study

Four salient themes emerging from our study are illustrated in Figure 2 above, and these are presented and analysed with examples in the following sub-sections.

ORANG ASLI ATTITUDES TOWARD FORMAL LEARNING IN PRIMARY & SECONDARY SCHOOLS

The research participants were asked about some of the struggles that Orang Asli children and teenagers faced in pursuing formal education in government schools. According to ‘Miss Melinda’ who is teaching in a primary school, in general, the attitudes toward formal learning amongst the Orang Asli ethnic groups have changed positively especially for those who are living near to urban or suburban areas. Her comment finds support in the observations made by the other three participants. Based on her own observation, many Orang Asli families now appreciate that formal education offers a better future for their children as it develops the children’s mind. Parents

especially, would try their best to send their kids to government schools to gain access to formal education. “At home, parents would tell the kids stories of successful people to boost their motivation to go to school and to learn”, Miss Melinda adds. For her, such efforts would somehow set a strong foundation in the children’s heart telling them that education really is important for the future life of Orang Asli children. As the theory by Azjen and Fishbein (1980) states, on the basis of behaviour, attitudes can be influenced by beliefs. Accordingly, if there is a strong belief in the hearts of Orang Asli peoples on the importance of accessing formal learning, they will probably not drop out from school. “Pursuing formal learning may not make you rich, but it is for sure will make you wise,” Miss Melinda tells her students, especially those who come from Orang Asli families.

Miss Melinda’s positive views are shared by ‘Madam Tijah’. She too is happy to see positive changes in Orang Asli children’s and teenager’s participation in formal education. It has indirectly increased the motivation among teachers especially when they can become real agents of change for their own Orang Asli communities. Canales and Maldonado (2018) argue that teachers’ motivation is one of the primary factors affecting students’ success. At the same time, Madam Tijah cautions that not all changes on the ground are totally positive:

Yes, I agree. Many Orang Asli families now realise that they must send their children to school. I don’t doubt that. I’m an Orang Asli too. But, having positive attitude is one thing, you still have to look at the bigger picture. I know many Orang Asli families who are living in poverty. These families can’t even afford to find food to eat. So, if you’re in a family like that, the children normally can’t go to school because finding money and food is more crucial, right? I’m sad because I think nowadays the gap between the rich Malaysians and the poor Orang Asli families are getting wider and wider. And, sorry, I don’t think our government is doing all that it can, to help our [Orang Asli] communities.

THE ROLES OF ORANG ASLI PARENTS & TEACHERS IN SUPPORTING FORMAL EDUCATION

For ‘Madam Elizabeth’, she feels that Orang Asli parents need to play a more prominent role because, “Nowadays many Orang Asli parents have been to schools themselves so they’re not as backwards as some Malaysian people think. Like your family, Orang Asli families also value education and schooling but they do need more support.” The ‘support’ comes when families get together within a village or community to make sure that all the young people in that village or community are sent to school, and to finish schooling up to secondary level, no matter what. All at once, to build this kind of consciousness is hard, given the fact that Orang Asli families especially those in rural and remote areas struggle with poverty, malnutrition and ailments. “It is the moral duty of the government to take them [the Orang Asli] out of this difficult situation, but if you take them, where will you place them? How will they make a living? How will they survive?” Madam Elizabeth asks. Undeniably, this is a difficult question to answer for stakeholders who are interested in assisting the Orang Asli peoples to become ‘modern’ and to adapt to a more contemporary lifestyle. At which point does the assistance become forcing the Orang Asli to leave behind their beliefs, customs and unique traditions?

Whatever the answer is, parents need to play their roles in ensuring good education for their children. Miss Melinda believes that everything starts at home, even more so for Orang Asli parents who rely a lot on non-formal education and learning to impart knowledge to their children.

She argues that Orang Asli parents should be helped to create “an environment that is learning friendly” in order to spur their children’s interest in learning. Although some Orang Asli parents are still illiterate, Miss Melinda has seen that they will still try their best to make sure that their children get their homework done and that the children go to school, every school day. Some of the Orang Asli parents that she knows even encourage their children to do extra learning activities such as reading and calculating. According to Lemmer (2007), improvements in behaviour such as optimistic attitudes can be seen if there is parental involvement. Miss Melinda adds:

Orang Asli parents should not depend on just teachers or the school as a whole when it comes to monitoring their children’s learning activities, completing homework and doing revision. It is something that needs togetherness. What this means is basically all of us need to work together as one team to help all these youngsters!

In addition, teachers, whether they are Orang Asli or not, must know the right approach “to tackle Orang Asli youngsters because their worldview might not be the same as the Malay people or Chinese or Indian,” says ‘Mister Alang Rinda’. Having been a teacher for nearly three decades, he believes that most Orang Asli children and teenagers become dropouts because their teachers do not understand the former’s learning styles and the teachers “refuse to learn about how we Orang Asli think about and see the world.” Mister Alang Rinda recounts a number of times when non-Orang Asli young teachers who have been posted to Orang Asli schools or schools with a large majority of Orang Asli students just gave up within a few weeks and asked for a transfer to a different school. Teachers should know their students before teaching them and one size fits all will not work as there can possibly be students who are being neglected or left out; they all come from various backgrounds and abilities. Therefore, teachers must first identify the right approach in order to come up with an effective lesson. As Miss Melinda observes, “Sometimes we even have to conduct activities with more than two types of approaches in a single class so that our Orang Asli children can understand and follow the subject matter that is being taught to them.” This is due mainly to the differences in learning styles amongst students, even more so with the Orang Asli who have been historically disadvantaged by the formal schooling system in Malaysia. Due to the aforementioned reasons, teachers of Orang Asli youngsters need to develop a more sensitive approach to teaching and learning.

THE RELEVANCE OF ORANG ASLI INFORMAL EDUCATION IN SUPPORTING FORMAL EDUCATION

Informal practices like the learning of traditional knowledge is not being practised by many families and communities in the here and now. According to Miss Melinda, “It might differ for those who are living in rural areas or remote places, but Orang Asli peoples who are living in urban or suburban areas are less likely to practise living skills that are taught by our ancestors.” Without question, development has touched the lives of some Orang Asli families and communities but not all. For Orang Asli children who now live in modernity, they prefer to spend more time on their smartphones as compared to going fishing, for instance. Still, for Madam Tijah, there are some informal practices that should not be forgotten as these can actually be used as a medium to boost positive spirits in making Orang Asli children better in terms of attitudes and motivation for learning. Telling Orang Asli folklore to Orang Asli youngsters, for instance, will teach them moral lessons about life and the values of living. The story of ‘*Pak Kaduk*’, a greedy man who lost his

village recurs in the mind of Miss Melinda because the story somehow managed to affect the way that she thinks as an adult. She laments:

Nowadays, we easily forget things. We forget all the good things in our lives. We should be grateful for everything that God has given us. Don't be greedy. The world is not for you alone. These are the things I have learnt from the story. It was just a story told by my parents and the old folks in my village, but you never know the impact the story may give to the little ones.

From the examples above and from the actual interviews conducted, all four participants agree that local and traditional knowledge (i.e., informal education) should still be taught to Orang Asli children as it teaches them so many of life's lessons. Informal education or learning can be very affective especially for younger Orang Asli children. Younger children are learning at their own pace in a more relaxed environment unlike within formal school systems (see Adnan, 2009; Cross, 2007). Knowledge about jungle life for example, such as the types of leaves and trees that can be sources of food or medication, should be taught to the children. From informal education, it is hoped that younger Orang Asli children would be spurred and inspired to pursue formal education as they age and mature.

THE EFFECTS OF THE PROCESS OF URBANIZATION ON ORANG ASLI FORMAL EDUCATION

The last salient theme from our research effort relates to the process of urbanization, which has both pros and cons. In the context of Orang Asli education, it might have done more good than bad although our research participants are divided in opinion. For Miss Melinda, who represents the younger generation of Orang Asli teachers, she fully believes that the process of urbanization has become one of the main attributes that moved the Orang Asli peoples forward in pursuing formal education more seriously. "Big supermarkets and shopping malls have changed our mindset from so called a timid community that feels more comfortable living away from civilization to a community that is able to mingle with others," she explains. Technological applications and devices like mobile gadgets also influenced and widened the worldview of Orang Asli youngsters in so many ways, such as adding to their general knowledge and helping them with their social skills. Miss Melinda adds:

From what I see, in my own community at least, our Orang Asli children are exposed to mobile gadgets a lot. We are quite lucky actually because what I see is each house must have at least one or two smartphones with mobile data. And here, in my school, almost all of my Orang Asli students they have their own social network accounts such as on Facebook and also on Instagram. Yes, there's bad and good in this. But this shows that not all Orang Asli communities are backwards and do not want to become more modern.

According to Jones, Blackey, Fitzgibbon and Chew (2010), the use of social networks can improve formal learning and become part of the students' educational ecosystem. However, too much of mobile gadgets could dilute students' interest in the real process of learning. In this case, both parents and schools should constantly remind children and teenagers of the good and bad of technology usage.

Mister Alang Rinda, however, has a more strong yet pragmatic view about the issue of urbanization and how it contributes or detracts from Orang Asli progress. He believes that, “In reality, for me, just pushing our Orang Asli communities out of the jungle into big cities is causing more harm than good.” He cites examples from his own village where Orang Asli teenagers are turning to drugs for recreation because it is so easy to gain access to illicit drugs when one lives in or near bigger cities. As the same time, he understands that keeping the Orang Asli peoples in the jungle or in remote places is not helping them to reap the fruits of progress and modernity, including making it perennially difficult to help Orang Asli children and teenagers to gain access to quality education. He understands that he does not have a simple and clear answer to this impasse but Mister Alang Rinda prefers to err on the side of caution when it comes to mass movements of Orang Asli from rural and remote areas to urban areas and large cities in Peninsular Malaysia. He adamantly states, “Sorry if I can’t accept taking all our lands then pushing us to live in big cities in the name of progress, just to make the government look like it’s doing something positive for the Orang Asli peoples.”

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Findings from this empirical study provide important insights with reference to formal education for the Orang Asli population living in modern Malaysia. The observations and sentiments of the four Orang Asli teachers on the schooling process of their own peoples are an eye opener not just for researchers and stakeholders who are interested in Orang Asli education, but also for any Malaysian who wants to have a clearer picture of the situation on the ground as it were. Notions of Orang Asli backwardness, laziness and other negative pictures of this uniquely diverse native population should now be questioned and perhaps rejected outright in the process of building a more contemporary account of Orang Asli lives and the education of Orang Asli youngsters for year 2020 going forward.

Into the bargain, the four core salient themes emerging from this empirical inquiry – Orang Asli attitudes toward their own formal learning process, the roles of Orang Asli parents and that of Orang Asli teachers in the process of formal education, the relevance of Orang Asli informal education in the schooling process, and the process of urbanization and its overall effects on Orang Asli formal education – are topic areas that must be further investigated and more carefully examined, to ensure that Orang Asli children and teenagers will have more open access to quality formal education no matter where they live in Peninsular Malaysia. With concerted and positive efforts by all stakeholders, it is hoped that more if not all Orang Asli children and teenagers will be able to finish their primary and secondary schooling at the very least, to be on par with the majority ethnic groups of this nation.

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