Educating the 'Orang Asli' (Native People) of Malaysia in the Eyes of Orang Asli Teachers

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Abstract
Tales of indigenous peoples being disenfranchised from modern life and marginalised from formal education to the world of work within various social spheres are nothing new. Even in more developed nations, it is problematic for some indigenous peoples to adapt to the lifestyles of the majority population, what more in developing countries where social justice is low and indigenous peoples in the name of development and modernity are left to fend for themselves. Centring on Malaysia's Orang Asli population, a qualitative study was conducted to map the field prior to a large-scale academic inquiry for the next two years at the Royal Belum State Park in the state of Perak, Malaysia. Four Orang Asli teachers in Perak state were interviewed individually to gather 'thick' qualitative data about the current state of the Orang Asli population in formal education (in primary and secondary schools). This empirical project is very interested in three main topic areas. First, how formal education and the schooling cycle play a part in the lives of children and adolescents living in Orang Asli communities. Second, what Orang Asli teachers and other educators do to ensure that Orang Asli children and adolescents benefit from their primary and secondary educational experience. And third, where is the position of non-formal or informal education within Orang Asli's lifespan

development, specifically for Orang Asli children and adolescents, as they face growing challenges in sustaining their traditional lifestyle.

Keywords: Formal Schooling, Informal Education, Lifespan Development, Native Peoples, Qualitative Study, Teaching and Learning.

Introduction

Teachers are critical to the nation-building process (Adnan & Smith, 2001), and they are the drivers of the formal learning process, whether in underdeveloped, developing, or developed economies (Martin, 2007; Richardson, 1997; Sharma & Choudhary, 2015). Formal education or learning differs from non-formal learning (Valli & Buese, 2007); formal education is conducted in kindergartens, schools, colleges, and universities (Shah et al., 2020). The formal education process also embraces the notion of evaluations and tests to ensure that the progress of learners from one level or standard to the next is formally reported. Formal reporting as the central core of formal education ensures that broad standards of educational achievement are met and that learners are ready to move from basic education to more complex education as they mature and age (Valiente et al., 2020). Non-formal education at the other end of the spectrum refers to teaching and learning that happens at home, in families, with friends, and within the community all around us (Shah et al., 2020). Together, both non-formal and formal education lead to the construction of the entire person, an individual who is willing to contribute and give back in a positive matter to society (Adnan, 2009).

Only teachers will genuinely build nation-states, not politicians nor any other societal players who usually have their own political interests, which are sometimes not aligned with a nation's goal and often more in line with their personal benefits (Shah & Adnan, 2020). In fact, politicians who cross into the realm of education are only bringing chaos and distracting us from the important actions to be taken to improve the teaching and learning experience within society (Fullan, 1993). On the other hand, teachers do everything they can to instruct the next generation of citizens to become agents of change regardless of gender, religion, ethnicity, or socio-economic group (see Fullan, 2002; Sparks, 2003). Such is the importance of the roles of teachers in modern society that this empirical 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 Research Literature

This section reviews literature from research related to the focus areas of this present study. It is divided into three subsections.

Quality Formal Education for Orang Asli Youngsters

Since the years after the country became independent from colonial rule in 1957, providing the Orang Asli with quality formal education has always been a critical issue particularly in the Malaysian scenario (see Adnan, 2010, 2011, 2012). One of the dilemmas facing the Orang Asli is the lack of quality education and living far away from good educational facilities (The New Straits Times, 2019). Despite developments in teaching and learning technologies, some Orang Asli children and teenagers are unable to gain access to state-of-the-art teaching and learning experiences due to the remoteness of some settlements making

quality formal education a serious problem for this diverse minority ethnic group. 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 taken by the Government-in-power since 1957, the private sector and even independently operated NGOs, many Orang Asli children and teenagers decide to drop out of formal education 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 Education to Future-ready Formal Education

Many different problems have hindered the pace of development for the Orang Asli and those who want to teach the Orang Asli population need to equip themselves with the requisite awareness and deeper exposure to the values, practices, and traditions of the Orang Asli. Renganathan (2018) indicates that teachers and others who volunteer to teach Orang Asli children and adolescents need to accept cultural differences in their pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning with the students, in order to address and combat endemic problems. Instead of Malaysian 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 laments:

> 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 et al., 2018).

In Jegatesen's study, the requests made by the Orang Asli are very much linked to the definition of identity. Rather than accept modern life and move to the city, the Orang Asli plans to bring the city into their traditional territories. The Orang Asli's clear act of preservation is this: Harmony can be reached based on this principle that city folks must first know about the Orang Asli, rather than vice versa. Homi Bhabba in Robson (2020) discusses the act of cultural preservation and identity preservation, suggesting that a tribe relies on their sense of identity as exclusion from other ethnic groups. 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.

Similarly, professional teachers and volunteer teachers should also learn and equip themselves with a variety of teaching methods and materials to meet the real needs of children and teenagers from Orang Asli communities. While there will be valid reasons for realistic constraints like Internet downtime and not enough equipment, educators can and should equip themselves with the pedagogical skills and expertise required to teach Orang Asli children and teenagers the best they could. Efforts in utilizing technology in everyday teaching and learning are strongly linked to Industrial Revolution 4.0 and the realization of 'Super Smart Societies' (see Adnan, 2018; Adnan et al., 2019; Adnan et al., 2020).

The Pressure on Orang Asli Youngsters in Malaysian Schools
Pedagogical approaches and remote areas are not the only predicaments related to formal education for the diverse populations of the Orang Asli in Malaysia. Vengadesan (2019) reports that some Orang Asli children who show interest in formal education and learning in schools were reportedly harassed, outcast and constantly ridiculed by local students from other majority Malaysian ethnic groups. Even some teachers are involved in taunting children and teenagers of Orang Asli descent: "One Orang Asli woman remembered how a teacher named her 'orangutan', while another said a teacher told her that teaching a monkey was easier than teaching an Orang Asli girl" (Vengadesan, 2019, online). True enough, Endicott (2016) argues that the bullying and mockery of Orang Asli students in Malaysia's multi-ethnic schools is a never-ending story, and just ignoring these derogatory comments and actions does not stop the emotional and physical suffering facing Orang Asli youths. 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 good intentions 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 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.

Section Summary

Teething problems such as lack of educational facilities, shortcomings in pedagogical methods, constant bullying and language barriers are common stumbling blocks for improving the lives of the diverse Orang Asli communities in the Malaysian Peninsular. As the global climate dramatically shifts, the jungle starts to vanish gradually to meet the needs of the rising population of Malaysia. The loss of untouched forest areas has become a major challenge to the populations of the Orang Asli, and thus formal education could be one of the best ways for them to cope with rapid social and environmental changes (Mohd Salim, Adnan, Shah, Tahir & Yusof, 2020). Other crucial issues relating to the Orang Asli as illustrated by Rabahi, Yusof and Awang (2016) are "lack of interest in education, negative attitudes, deprivation, failure to enforce policies, low accessibility and parental participation, curriculum, pedagogical skills, consistency of school administrators' leadership, school climate, and the Orang Asli society's social-cultural atmosphere" (p. 1). Unquestionably, we need to reconsider the approaches together to help save and develop the Orang Asli lifestyle (Nasr & Farooqui, 2015).

Background of this Study and the Research Methods

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?
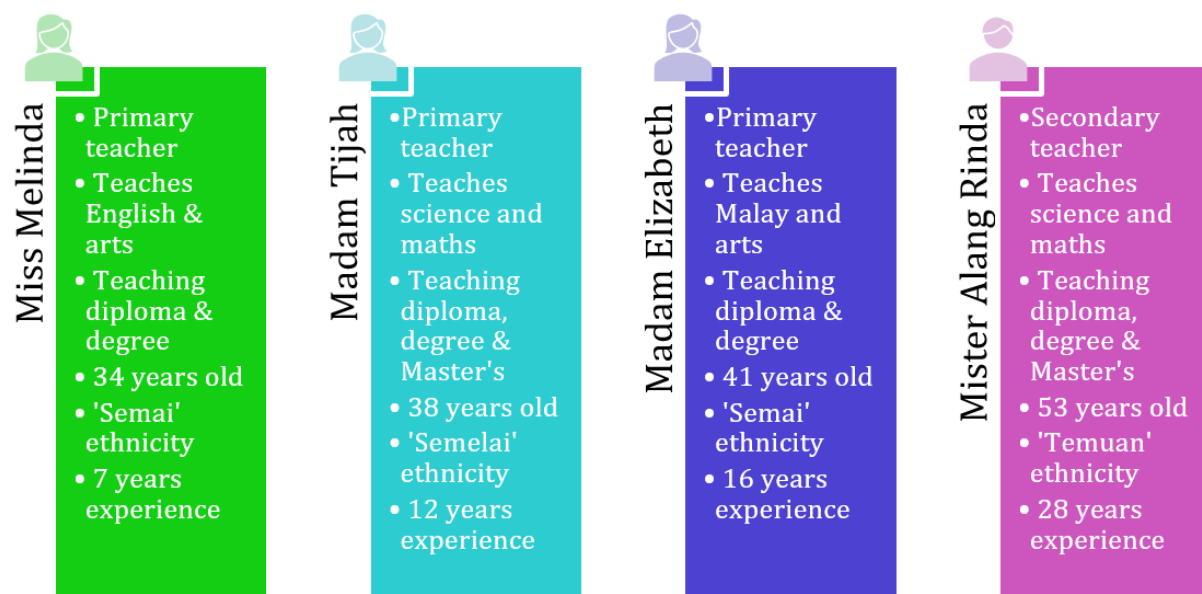
Miss Melinda
- Primary teacher
- Teaches English & arts
- Teaching diploma & degree
- 34 years old
- 'Semai' ethnicity
- 7 years experience

Madam Tijah
- Primary teacher
- Teaches science and maths
- Teaching diploma, degree & Master's
- 38 years old
- 'Semelai' ethnicity
- 12 years experience

Madam Elizabeth
- Primary teacher
- Teaches Malay and arts
- Teaching diploma & degree
- 41 years old
- 'Semai' ethnicity
- 16 years experience

Mister Alang Rinda
- Secondary teacher
- Teaches science and maths
- Teaching diploma, degree & Master's
- 53 years old
- 'Temuan' ethnicity
- 28 years experience

Figure 1. Information about the four research participants in this qualitative study

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.

Data Presentation and Critical 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.
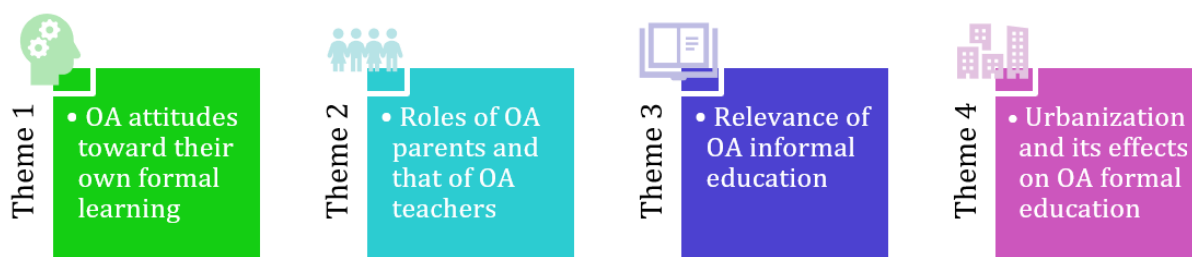
Figure 2. The salient themes emerging from this study

Four core or salient themes emerging from our study are illustrated in Figure 2. They will be presented and critically analysed with relevant examples in the following sub-sections.

'Orang Asli Attitudes toward the Formal Learning Process in Malaysian Schools'
The 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.

'Roles of Orang Asli Parents and Teachers in the Formal Learning Process'

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. Due to the aforementioned reasons, teachers of Orang Asli youngsters need to develop a more sensitive approach to teaching and learning.

'Orang Asli Informal Education Supporting Malaysian 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:

> 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 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.

'Urbanisation and its Effects 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 mobiles 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 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."

Conclusion

Findings from this empirical research project provide valuable lessons for the Orang Asli community living in modern Malaysia with regards to formal education. The insights and feelings of the four Orang Asli teachers on their own people's schooling cycle are an eye opener not only for researchers and stakeholders involved in Orang Asli education, but also for any Malaysian who would like to have a better understanding of the situation on the ground. The negative ideas of Orang Asli backwardness, laziness, and other derogatory pictures of this particular diverse indigenous community should be challenged and dismissed outright in the context of creating a more contemporary account of Orang Asli lives and to further strengthen the education of Orang Asli youths for 2020 and beyond.

Four salient themes emerged from this empirical study: Orang Asli attitudes toward their own formal learning process; Roles of Orang Asli parents and that of Orang Asli teachers in the process of formal education; Relevance of Orang Asli informal education in the schooling process; Urbanisation and its effects on Orang Asli formal education. These are also topic areas that must be further probed and more meticulously examined, to make certain that Orang Asli children and teenagers will have more open access to quality formal education no matter where they live in Peninsular Malaysia. With more focused and proactive efforts by all stakeholders, it is hoped that more if not all Orang Asli children and teenagers would be able to finish their primary and secondary schooling at the very least, to be on par with the majority ethnic groups of Malaysia.

Acknowledgement

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