# Leading Learning among the Indigenous Orang Asli Students: Setting the Scene

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper highlights the initializing stage of a Grounded Theory research that focusses on how some students from the Indigenous Orang Asli community survived deficit theorizing; a theorizing approach that rationalizes the learning disengagement among them. Influenced by arguments of the anti-deficit thinkers, this research seeks to understand the situation from the perspective of strength. Research sampling was purposeful, within the context of theoretical sampling following the Grounded Theory method. The main data was provided by participants who have reached the tertiary level education. Although, data has been gathered through unstructured interviews with sixteen (16) participants, this paper presents the experience of the key researcher in the initial exploratory data collection from fieldwork, and findings from two in-depth unstructured interviews with the first participant, which sets the scene for the subsequent research process. The main aim is to describe how the GT research took start. The final findings are expected to provide an in-depth knowledge of the leading learning process among the successful Orang Asli students; providing lessons learned for students, parents, teachers, schools, community, and policy makers to consider for the betterment of the Indigenous education. The study will contribute to the body of literature that supports strength-based practice for the continuous improvement of the Indigenous Orang Asli community.

**Keywords:** Grounded Theory Method, Indigenous Research, Leading Learning, Learning Disengagement, Orang Asli Research, Strength-Based Practice.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Orang Asli is the official name of the Peninsular Malaysia Indigenous community. The Orang Asli represent about 0.6 percent (178,197 at 2013 as cited in JAKOA, 2016) of the total population. They comprise diverse groups of 18 Indigenous ethnic tribes, distinguished by their respective ethnic languages and social-cultural identities (Lye, 2011; Tarmiji, Fujimaki & Norhasimah, 2013; JAKOA, 2015). Their social and economic position situates them among the disadvantaged minorities; the majority living beneath the poverty line (Mohd Asri, 2012) and marginalised (Johari & Nazri, 2007; Tarmiji, Fujimaki & Norhasimah, 2013). Historically, the Orang Asli education was formalized in 1952 (Edo, 2012). Since then, educating the community has been one of the Government's priorities (MOE, 2013).

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The community has achieved considerable progress in education (KPM, 2008). However, research indicates that the educational attainment of the Orang Asli children has been problematic (Wan Afizi, Shaharuddin & Noraziah, 2014; SUHAKAM, 2015; Norwaliza, Ramlee & Abdul Razaq, 2016). Prevalent issues include learning disengagement and low achievement. As an Indigenous group, the achievement has not been at par with the national progress (Nicholas, 2006; Sharifah et al. 2011; United Nation, 2011; DPM, 2012). For instance, Sharifah et al. (2011) highlight the problems of learning disengagement among the children; despite improvement initiatives carried out by the Government. The authors state a dropout rate of 47.23% for year 2000 cohort at primary level. This means 47.23% of the children registered for the cohort did not complete their primary education. In another study, Mohd Asri (2012) cites a dropout rate of 39.1% in 2008, reducing to 29% in 2010 and 26% in 2011. However, the dropout problem appears to disappear in JAKOA (2016) who reports a dropout rate of -21.05% for the 2009 cohort due to extensive campaign for primary enrolment by the relevant Government agencies. Dropouts after Year 6, though, remain high (22.09% in 2010). The dropouts refer to students who were enrolled in Year 6 in 2010 but did not continue to Form 1 at the secondary level (JAKOA, 2016).

Past research has attributed the Orang Asli educational problems to the lack of interest in schooling, attitude, poverty, implementation failure, accessibility, parental involvement, curriculum, pedagogical skills, the quality of leadership of school administrators, the school climate, and social cultural milieu of the Orang Asli society (Nicholas, 2006; Kamaruddin & Jusoh, 2008; Sharifah et al., 2011; Mohd Asri, 2012; Ramle, Wan Hasmah, Amir Zal & Asmawi, 2013; Ramlee, 2013). For instance, in a study of literacy level of aboriginal students, Ramlah & Aslina (2013) concluded that psychosocial problems including family environment, low family income, mother tongue language, cognitive ability, curriculum and the Orang Asli culture, hinder the Orang Asli students from going to school. In a study on the implementation of the Cluster of Excellence Policy at an Orang Asli school, Mohd Asri (2012) highlights the issue of absenteeism and pupils' dissatisfaction despite the extensive effort allocated to the pioneering initiative. He narrates an interesting scene:

> Pupil absenteeism is another obstacle to the implementation of the initiative. Throughout the site visit period, it was observed that about 5 to 6 pupils were absent during the morning roll call. Every day, the on-duty teacher would have to seek these pupils at their homes. Sometimes, the teacher would have to wake the pupils and wait for them to get ready to go to school. Teachers believe lack of interest among parents and pupils means it is impossible to maintain high standards at the school. The same lack of commitment was observed during English night classes and cultural performance training sessions. Some parents blame their children's attitude saying that they have tried everything to make them go to school. While others, especially the parents of female pupils believe that education will not take them anywhere. Pupils, on the other hand, cite too much homework, strict teachers, uninteresting activities and tiredness as some of the reasons for staying away from school. (Mohd Asri, 2012, p. 98)

The scene reflects a vicious cycle of blame wherein teachers attributing the cause of the problem to parents and pupils; parents to their children (the pupils); and pupils back to their

teachers. Despite support from the Government and other agencies, why our Orang Asli students are still underachieving and remain disengaged from school.

Previous studies have explored the problems from the perspectives of school administrators, teachers, parents, and community leaders. Few are those that represent learners. It is therefore the intent of this study to explore and understand, how some others among these students have been able to complete the schooling process and beyond, successfully, despite the oft cited challenges and barriers. The initialising phase of this study is guided by the following questions:

- How did the Orang Asli students lead their learning?
- How did the Orang Asli parents lead their children in learning?
- How did the teachers lead the learning of the Orang Asli students?
- How did the school heads lead the learning of the Orang Asli students?

This paper presents the initial thoughts and considerations that set the scene for the main grounded theory (GT) study on how learning is led among the Orang Asli students at the primary level.

## 2. THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The theoretical considerations for this study are based upon the initial review of the literature, summarized for the purpose of this paper under three key theories: theory of deficit, theory of culturally responsive pedagogy of relations and a proposed theory of hope.

**Theory of Deficit:** Generally, the deficit theory in education forwards the idea that problems of dropouts and learner disengagement are due to deficiencies from the student's side of the divide (Valencia, 2010). Deficit theorizing sees diversity in lifestyle, language, and ways of learning, as problematic, and views the deficiencies of poor and minority students, their families and communities as the causes of students' school problems and academic failure (Valencia, 1997; 2010).

In similar manner, the deficit perspective is reflected in the Orang Asli education, in which past research on underachievement and dropouts have highlighted reasons that include problems of interest, attitude, poverty, accessibility, parental involvement, curriculum, teacher's pedagogical skills, school leadership, school climate, and social cultural milieu of the Orang Asli society (Nicholas, 2006; Kamaruddin & Jusoh, 2008; Mahmud, Amat & Yaacob, 2008; Sharifah et al., 2011; Mohd Asri, 2012). No doubt the deficit perspective has triggered varied continuous improvement initiatives, yet the same studies indicate many unresolved challenges, indicating a need to explore a new perspective to understand the problem. The new lens is that of the anti-deficit thinkers'.

**Theory of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy of Relations:** In contrast to the deficit theory, Howard (1994), Ladson-Billings (1995), Nelson (2002), and Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh and Teddy (2007) presented an anti-deficit thinking perspective. Bishop, Berryman, Wearmouth, Peter and Clapham (2011) concluded from a New Zealand ten-year study of Indigenous Maori students, that it is for effective teachers to: first, "understand the need to explicitly reject deficit theorizing as a way of explaining Maori students' educational achievement levels," and second, "to take an agentic position in their theorizing about their practice," (Bishop et al.,

2011, p.13). In an agentic position teachers identify and challenge existing belief about their students, embrace the opportunity to effect change, believe that they can and know how to make a difference, build relationship with, and build self-belief in the students.

Bishop et al. (2007) built upon the theorising of similar others (Cummins, 1995; Gay, 2000; Sidorkin, 2002; Villegas & Lucas 2002; Bishop et al., 2007), and forwarded a theory of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy of Relations that emphasises power sharing, culture, interactive dialogic and spiral learning, and commitment to common vision for excellence in educational outcomes. Although, their research focus was that based upon the Indigenous students at secondary level (Year 9 and 10), the study provides key lessons learned and hope for a new perspective to improve the Orang Asli education – a multi-disciplinary perspective model of hope.

**A Multi-Disciplinary Perspective 'A Model of Hope':** Nicholas (2006) argues that, education to an Orang Asli is about being a good person. This is in contrast to the official focus of education as a human capital development tool, which is to prepare students for "the challenges of 21$^{st}$ century economy" (KPM, 2013), p.E-9). As a result, despite the many initiatives carried out by the Government; achievement remains a problem, indicating a need to build a shared vision. A shared vision can only be realised through understanding of our own individual mental models and that of others (Senge, 1990).

A review on the educational problems of Orang Asli children provides information on its contributing factors. We also found that, past initiatives and programs have focused primarily on improving factors and provisions related to accessibility, infrastructure, facilities and teachers' skills, and attempts for Indigenous curriculum. Less focus is noted on the learning experience of the children and the children as learners. Scholtes (1998) argues that education is about leading learning. Based upon Scholtes' precept, we envisage education as leading learning within the context of the community. Consequently, our initialising thoughts and conceptual model drew upon our own experience (Misnaton, 2001) and examination of the following theoretical perspectives: quality management, learning organization, and language learning and minority education.

First is the discipline of quality management that is built upon the premise of continuous improvement. The underpinning theory in quality management is rooted in the belief that everyone is educable (Deming, 1986, 1994; Tribus, 1994). The emphasis is on continuous improvement through customer focus, effective leadership, people involvement, understanding process, and systems thinking (UNICEF, 2000). Taking our cue from this perspective, quality in learning must focus on customers and continuous improvement, in which leadership is a major driver.

Second, what makes the learning organisation theory relevant in this study is the systems approach to learning. According to Senge (1990) and his mentors (Argyris, 1982; Argyris & Schon, 1978), real learning is generative learning, learning how to learn, leading one's own learning, and seeing context as systems. Thus, in the context of this research, the systems approach will enable the researchers to see the problem of Orang Asli students in inter-related contexts, generating a perspective that encompasses the community, school and the stakeholders.

Third, theories of educational good practice at primary level are effectively linked with language learning theories (Vygotsky, 1978, 2005; Jawaid, 1998, 2014; Moreland, Jawaid & Dhillon, 2000; Cummins, 2005; Richard-Amato & Snow, 2005). For instance, Vygotsky (1978, 2005) and Jawaid (1998) argue that learning of the children is invariably linked to how the learning is scaffold by teachers, parents, schools and the community as whole. Other authors such as Desforges (2003) and Peters, Seeds, Goldstein and Coleman (2008) provide perspective of parental involvement in children's education.

Thus shaped by the above theories, our initial conceptual model (Figure 1) for the proposed study incorporates key concepts pertaining to improvement process, systemic learning, and good practice from language learning and Indigenous research. This 'model of hope' conceptualises a preliminary leading learning model comprising the following key processes:

- Initialising learning: how the individual starts and seeks help to start the learning process;
- Facilitating learning: how the individual creates the means to ease continuity of learning;
- Accommodating learning: how the individual adapts, adjusts and reconciles differences of the old and the new, learning for survival or survival learning, and applying learning; and
- Generating learning: how the individual expands the ability to produce the results, he or she truly wants; learning for generating the new and the novel; the generative learning.

At this juncture, it must be emphasised that the above model is a preliminary tool for thinking about the process of how learning is led with respect to the Orang Asli children. Consistent within the GT approach, we have used the literature towards a better understanding of the issue, a concept referred to in grounded theory method as theoretical sensitivity (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The literature in GT also provides additional data for the study.

## 3. METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The methodological considerations are guided by the nature of the problem of our study. Our intent is to generate a path of understanding which would not be effective, "when people bring their preconceptions into an interaction and speak from a place of already knowing instead of engaging with openness, a desire to learn, and respect for what might emerge (Oberg, Blades & Thom, 2007, p.134)". Research authors suggest that the GT method is a practical method to uncover and understand complex processes unhindered by previous conceptions, and to generate theory grounded in data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Creswell, 2007, 2009; Merriam, 2009; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The next step is to decide which GT method to adopt from among the multi versions of the GT approach. Consequently, upon considerations described below, Glaser's classic GT method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) is deemed the most appropriate to explore 'what contributed' to the sustained schooling of some students among these Orang Asli children despite their deficit conditions.

**Issues in GT Method:** Despite the initial collaboration of Glaser and Strauss "the two authors ultimately disagreed about the meaning and procedures of grounded theory" (Creswell, 2007,

p.63). Glaser's criticism is that Strauss's approach to GT is too prescribed and structured. Glaser himself espouses the autonomy, originality, contribution and power of GT method: such that a researcher can explore potentials and possibilities on her or his own pacing, give birth to originality of ideas and methods, contributes innovative solutions, and feels the power of discovering and conceptualising latent patterns in a substantive area (Glaser & Holton, 2004; Glaser, 2006). Whilst Glaser emphasises immersion, induction and emergence, Strauss is concerned with systematic procedure of the methodology towards validity of the approach and the resulting theory (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). In addition, Charmaz (2006) has issues with Glaser's perspective of theory discovered from data. Trained by both Glaser and Strauss, she argues for the constructivist GT, that the theory in GT method is constructed rather than discovered. For Charmaz, neither data nor theory is discovered; rather both are constructed by the researcher and the research participants-informants during interactions, observations and fieldwork.

Second is the issue of prior knowledge in GT method. Glaser emphasises the need to avoid doing in-depth literature review in the substantive area. He argues for data-led theory generation, rather than literature led conceptualisation of theory. This issue was discussed at length by McCallin (2003, 2006a) in which she argues that "critical analysis of existing literature, regardless of timing, opens up the mind to the strengths and limitations in received writing, and for consideration in relation to the developing theory" (McCallin 2006b, p.56). In congruence with McCallin, Birks and Mills (2011) state that, "through the comparison of theoretical concepts with coded data, the literature can potentially become a source of data in itself, if it earns its way into the developing grounded theory," (p.61). Glaser and Strauss (1967) concur that, "Of course, the researcher does not approach reality as a tabula rasa. He must have a perspective that will help him see relevant data and abstract significant categories from his scrutiny of the data," (p.3). Indeed Glaser recommended that the researcher reads vociferously in other areas and fields while doing GT in order to increase theoretical sensitivity (Birks & Mills, 2011; Suddaby, 2006). Both Glaser and Strauss point to the literature as one source of data and to increase theoretical sensitivity for theory generation. Sensitivity means "having insight, being tuned in to, being able to pick up relevant issues, events, and happenings in data," (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p.32). Our present research takes its practical cues from Corbin and Strauss (2008), along with that of Charmaz (2006) and Birks and Mills (2011). However, the original work of the founders (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) remains our underpinning guide for conceptual reference and elaborations; whilst the detailed GT method used in this research is adapted from Hoda (2011), who adopted the original founders' classic GT method.

**Sampling in GT Method:** According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), where to sample, where to go to obtain the data necessary to further the development of the evolving theory is directed by theoretical sampling technique. This is a technique that differentiates GT method from that of conventional sampling methods. Theoretical sampling is defined as, "sampling on the basis of concepts derived from data," (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p.65); a "process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyses his data and decides what data to collect next, and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p.45). Thus, data collections are focused on concepts that appear to be

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relevant to the evolving story line; instead of sampling persons, the researcher is purposely looking for indicators of the emerging concepts. In theoretical sampling, "The researcher aims to develop the properties of his or her developing categories or theory; the researcher seeks people, events, or information to illuminate and define the boundaries and relevance of the categories" (Charmaz, 2006, p.189). This means, GT researchers go to places, persons, and situations that will provide information about the concepts they want to learn more about (Corbin & Strauss 2008). But how do we begin? Of course, "The researcher begins a study with a general target population and continues to sample from that group" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p.145). Based upon this guideline, our study takes the Orang Asli students as our general target population. The initial issues of dropouts and learning disengagement led to the theoretical concepts of leading learning among them. The concepts arose from delving into the literature in quality, learning organisation, Indigenous education, and language learning and minority education. This is in accord with Glaser and Straus (1967), who suggest that research can start with a partial framework of concepts representing the structure and processes in the situation in which the study will be conducted, especially when such preliminary work is to fulfil the requirements for graduate research initial proposal. The second step was exploratory fieldwork comprising visits and conversations with personnel in-charge of the Orang Asli affair at the Department of Orang Asli Development, also known as *Jabatan Kemajuan Orang Asli* (JAKOA), and a head teacher of an Orang Asli primary school, in order to get a glimpse of one context of an Orang Asli school. The third step was an attempt to understand how learning was led in the case of a student who has progressed successfully through the schooling system. At this stage we were sufficiently theoretically sensitive, such that we could conceptualise and formulate our next steps.

When to stop? Theoretical sampling stops when we reach theoretical saturation. Theoretical saturation, also referred to as conceptual saturation, refers to the point at which gathering more data about a theoretical category reveals no new properties nor yields any further theoretical insights about the emerging grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006). Similarly, Corbin & Strauss (2008) who refer to this limiting stage as conceptual saturation, defined it as the process of acquiring sufficient data to develop each category or theme fully in terms of its properties and dimensions and to account for variation. In other words, theoretical sampling stops, when new data do not result in further elaboration of a concept or category.

To date, data has been collected from 16 in-depth interviews with students from the local institutes of higher education. Some students have since graduated. Each interview was about two hours, with breaks, and recorded with consent. However, this paper presents the initial findings from two in-depth interviews with the first research participant. The main purpose is to show how the grounded theory research process took start.

## 4. DATA COLLECTION

Data collection at the initial stage covered two needs. First, the need of the key researcher to familiarise herself with, and understand the Orang Asli school learning environment, and the life of an Orang Asli student. Second was the need for leads for further data collection. The initial familiarisation was through visits to the state and the district level departments that manage the affairs of the Orang Asli community, and conversations with the head teacher and teachers of an Orang Asli primary school, an Orang Asli community liaison worker, who was from the same community as that of the primary school.

A second familiarisation was through two in-depth interviews, each about two hours long, with an Orang Asli student in her final semester of the Bachelor of Education programme at a Teacher Training Institute, Malaysia. The sole Orang Asli student at the institute, she was invited to participate, through a personal contact. The purpose was to explore and understand through, narratives of her life; how she has attained her current level of education, and the conditions as well as provisions availed to her throughout her school years (kindergarten, primary and secondary). The research ethics considerations include that of a signed informed consent, explaining the purpose and the limitations of data use (Merriam, 2009). The interviews were in *Bahasa Melayu*, conducted in an informal and relaxed environment, where conversations consisted of dialogues that were intended to stir the remembrance of time past. Conversations were audio recorded with the knowledge and agreement of the research participant.

## 5. FINDINGS

Data analysis in a GT study is structured by the constant comparative method comprising the concurrent process of open coding of raw data, selective coding, memo writing and further data collection. It is a method of analysis that generates successively more abstract concepts and theories through inductive processes of comparing data with data, data with category, and category with concept (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2006). We compare incident against incident for similarities and differences. Incidents that are found to be conceptually similar to previously coded incidents are given the same conceptual label and put under the same code. Each new incident that is coded under a code adds to the general properties and dimensions of that code, elaborating it and bringing in variation (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). As the aim of this paper is to show the start of the grounded theory process - a critical phase for researchers new to the method - the data analysis is limited to open coding and memo-writing on emerging concepts and categories. The data was examined for indicators of provisions that resolved the concerns of the participant.

The findings are listed under categories defined by actions and behaviours of the emerging roles: Parents, Student, Kindergarten, Primary School and Significant Others. In this analysis, we found the concept 'Parents' comprised the entire family of Father, Mother, Grandfather, Grandmother and Older Sister, who had impacted the Participant's learning achievement and engagement. Whilst, Significant Others comprised other family members, other students'

achievement from the same community and the government agencies' provisions that facilitated the research participant's learning process.

The initial results of open coding are intended only as baseline to guide the subsequent data collection. Although the interviews covered the participant's experiences during her secondary school years, these data have not been analysed for concepts pertaining to the leading learning process. The secondary schooling data was invaluable to the key researcher in that it provided her a better contextual sensitivity of the student, her schooling challenges and achievements beyond the primary level.

**Context:** The scene of this narrative was in the state of Johor, Malaysia. There were five villages and one town whose communities were closely linked with each other. These villages and town are coded as: V1-V2-V3-V4-V5-T1. V1 was the innermost village. The distance from V1 to Town T1 was approximately 40 kilometers, through gravel roads used by both the communities and the timber-carrying heavy vehicles. When it rained, the road surface was usually eroded resulting in potholes. The road was not waterlogged due its location in hilly area. Access to a bus route was just after Town T1, at a junction of a bus route connecting two other main towns, T2 and T3. The nearest bus station was in Town T2 about 45 minute-drive from T1. During the initial years, the family of the research participant comprised Grandfather (GF), Grandmother (GM), Mother (46)(M), First Sibling-Brother (30)(B1), Second Sibling-Sister (29)(S2), and the Research Participant (24)(P1). Upon mother's remarriage, there was Step-Father (47)(F2), Fourth Sibling-Sister (17)(S4), Fifth Sibling-Brother (13)(B5), and Sixth Sibling-Sister (5)(S6). All ages of the living relatives given were ages at the time of the interviews. The Father (F1) died when P1 was two weeks old. M married F2 when P1 was 7 years old. In other words, M was a single parent since P1 was two weeks old through her kindergarten (KG) - first and second – years. The entire family lived in V2. They finally moved to V5 when P1 completed her Year 3 of *Sekolah Rendah* (SR) – the Primary School. Detailed findings of this familiarisation case are presented and discussed below.

**Parents Leading Learning (Mother):** Mother, despite having no schooling opportunity herself, believed that education is an important vehicle to exit the hardship and poverty situation. She had high expectation of her child, and despite the death of her husband two weeks after the birth of P1, made effort to ensure that her child did not miss the kindergarten and subsequent schooling years. She moved to V4 to be near the KG and worked as a farm worker. She built a one-room hut for accommodation and shared the hut with other Orang Asli children who came from the far inland community. She attended the initial KG weeks of her child to support and comfort her, and in the process learned the basics of writing, which she used to help P1 at home. She provided simple learning provisions at home, such as coloured pencils, and set daily routines to initiate and facilitate her children's learning. Although they speak the language of their Indigenous tribe, mother also spoke *Bahasa Melayu*.

**Parents Leading Learning (Older Siblings):** The role of older siblings in the learning process was not anticipated by the researcher initially. The case, however, showed how an older sister, who worked in a distant town, financially supported the education of her siblings. The sister had passed her Malaysian Certificate of Education (SPM).

**Parents Leading Learning (Grandparents):** This is also another aspect of family involvement that was not initially anticipated by the researcher. In the context of P1, grandparents played a significant role in her initial education: GM as carer in the absence of mother, and GF provided financial support in the absence of father. GM also taught the traditional knowledge of Orang Asli to P1 during her early years, resolving concern of real life problems arising from living in isolated communities. There was pride in P1's voice as she described her GF's ability to make, sell as well as play the violin, suggesting a role model value of a grandparent.

**Student Leading Learning (P1):** Her seed of independence was sown at an early age. Prior to the kindergarten she was left with GM when mother went to collect forest products. She was sent to live with an aunt during the first two years of SR. She was boarded at the school hostel in the third year of SR. She was excited about going to the KG and did not cry because mother stayed with her in the classroom throughout her first week. She adapted quickly to the new learning environment of the KG, made friends within the week, and mother was no longer missed. She enjoyed the KG and school because there were many friends. She made friends easily but had no best friend because she got along with everybody. In the KG she enjoyed singing songs, playing musical instruments, tracing and writing the alphabet and *Jawi* script, and tracing and drawing shapes. She became interested in the English Language from watching an English children programme. The television, in black and white, was at an uncle's place, operated using a generator. She took to daily routine easily, preparing for school in the morning, taking bath using water piped from the river. She enjoyed playing many traditional games with friends after completing school work. She was clear about her ambition: in Year 4 she wanted to be a teacher and in Year 6 she wanted to be a doctor. She was an avid reader, reading story books almost daily during her primary years; her daily routine included borrowing and returning books on daily basis. After primary school she attended a secondary school in Town T1. Upon reflection she voiced deep regrets about her siblings' missing education: older sister was not able to attend further education after SPM due to financial constraint, younger sister (S4) dropped out of school during Year 6 and did not attempt the Primary School Achievement Test, and younger brother, B5, dropped out of school during Form 1. It was also evident from the interview sessions that she had high confidence level, sense of direction, and good sense of humour.

**Kindergarten Leading Learning:** This reflects the role of the first and second KG teachers (KT1 and KT2), the support and provisions provided by the KG in leading the learning of P1. First, KT1 was very caring (P1 emphasised "very, very caring"). She was from outside the community. The SR was next to the KG and had teachers' quarters where KT1 resided along with other female teachers. KT1 used to carry books and the action was imprinted in the student's memory because of her love for books. KT2 carried on the duty when KT1 left after her marriage. The KG facilitated learning by allowing mother to be with P1 throughout the first week of attending KG. Provisions included writing and reading materials, and stationery. Familiar faces helped P1 settled in the KG: a female Teacher Assistant who was an older cousin of P1 and another male cousin enrolled in the same class with P1. The KG had combined mini sports day with the SR, in which P1 remembered enjoying thoroughly. This event provided the kindergartners interactions with the primary school students, thus paving a future into the next primary schooling.

**Primary School Leading Learning:** This includes the role of hostel in facilitating school attendance, and setting the routine for learning; a supportive male teacher who went out all the way, on a motorbike, to the hinterland isolated community to deliver the good news about financial assistance for P1; and memorable co-curriculum events to enliven the learning process. The role of library emerges as an important entity that contributed to the learning process of P1 who was an avid reader.

**Significant Others Leading Learning:** 'Significant Others' in this case is defined as people, agencies or institutions that had direct or indirect impact on the student's education and learning process. In this context, several roles and concepts appear to have influenced P1's educational focus: achievement of other community members in education, the village head, also known as the *Tok Batin*, and his role in facilitating access to the kindergarten and school, The Government's provision such as new village development scheme that enabled P1 and family to move closer to the school, vehicle for the *Tok Batin*'s role in ferrying the students, and the Department for Orang Asli Development (JAKOA), and its role in the disbursement of aids and disseminating knowledge about education.

Data from this familiarisation case have not been analysed into the different components of the initial conceptual model of Leading Learning - that of Initialising, Facilitating, Accommodating and Generating Learning. This is essentially due to the explorative nature of this stage. But as more data were collected, the constant comparative coding and memoing revealed the extent of each category that defines its properties and dimensions. The following example is an extract from Misnaton, Hamidah and Marinah (2015) that illustrates the sub-category of Initialising Learning within the category of Parents Leading Learning.

> The concept 'initialising' is similar to that use in computing, which is to set the value or put in the condition appropriate to the start of an operation; although in this study, the concept 'value' takes on a different shade. Value in this context, is belief and aspiration for a better future. Hence, based upon the findings, the category of initialising learning is defined by the belief, aspirations and the conditions that exist to initiate learning. The extent of initialising learning is indicated by the home learning environment and routine comprising: (a) communicating belief and aspiration, (b) providing learning space and learning resources, (c) setting learning routine and, (d) having learning initiators. (Misnaton, Hamidah & Marinah, 2015, p.96).

## 6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Setting the scene for the GT study include addressing the initial critical issues of which GT method to adopt, identifying emerging concerns and concepts and getting familiar with the art of memoing. We conclude with contributions to the body of knowledge, implication for practice and further work.

**Choosing a GT method:** Getting started in this GT research involved a period of trying to understand and decide which path to adopt among the three paths built by the major proponents of the method: the classic GT of Glaser (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), the more technical GT of Strauss (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) or the constructivist GT of Charmaz (2006). Our research finally adopts the classic GT of Glaser that empowers a researcher with autonomy and freedom.

However, Corbin and Staruss (2008) and Charmaz (2006) provide elaborations that give practical meaning to the concepts discussed in the original work of the founders. GT applications by earlier researchers such as Hoda (2011), McCallin (2006a) and Jawaid (1998) contributed to the confidence in its use. Moreover, the classic GT has an online GT journal and support established by Glaser and the classic GT team that researchers can use to develop a continuous understanding of the method, and access detailed guidance by the founder himself (Glaser, 2006, 2012).

**Emerging concerns, concepts and categories:** The minor literature review, field visits and conversations with the relevant authority-in-charge set the initial direction for the study. Subsequent in-depth interviews with the first research participant provided focus, as roles, concepts and categories emerged from the participant's experience. An example was the emerging roles of grandparents and older siblings. Concerns and resolutions identified from the data gave direction for further data collection. For instance, mother was concerned with the future of her daughter, and this concern was resolved through her actions, such as finding a job and moving to be near the kindergarten and school. The action reflects an example of how parents made life adjustment to accommodate the learning requirements of their children.

**Memoing:** Critical to the GT method is memo-writing. Memoing is important to identify and give structure to the emerging categories and their properties, and to assist in making decision for further theoretical sampling. During memoing, relevant literature provides secondary data that gives focus and helps us to make sense of the data. Memo ensures thoughts are captured quickly. Memoing must not be constrained by concerns for language and grammar. As more concepts and categories emerge from the study, the memo is revisited and updated accordingly. A sample resulting from the constant comparative analysis of the participants' data to-date is illustrated in the following memo (A more comprehensive discussion of Orang Asli parents leading learning is in Misnaton, Hamidah & Marinah, 2015).

> **MEMO: 27.01.15:** Family Leading Learning – Initialising and Facilitating Learning - Home Learning Environment: The concept of 'home learning environment' comprises a range of learning related provisions including, "reading, library visits, playing with letters and numbers, painting and drawing, teaching (through play) the letters of the alphabet, playing with numbers and shapes, teaching nursery rhymes and singing" (Desforges, 2003, p.23). Data shows that, within the limits of their socio-economic situation, there existed practices that maintained a favourable home learning environment, which contributed to the students' initiation to learning, and provisions and activities that scaffold continuous learning engagement. For instance, P1 had a mother who provided coloured pencils and helped her with her writing skills; holding her hands to write and trace the alphabet. P5 had older siblings who taught him to recite the alphabet and celebrated his academic achievement with simple affordable rewards. P5 also had a mother who, while preparing him for school would constantly remind him to study hard, not to follow the bad ways of others, to emulate the good of others, to acquire knowledge, because knowledge gives one an advantage for better life. Due to financial limitation, P2 did not have the opportunity to attend the kindergarten, but mother taught her at home. Thus, when P2 entered the primary school she could understand

what the teacher wrote on the board. There was pride in her voice when she related that at the end of her first primary year, she achieved the first position in class, despite not having kindergarten experience. See also Froiland, Peterson, and Davison (2012) and Carpentieri (2012). [Note: P1, P2 and P5 refer to First Participant, Second Participant and Fifth participant respectively].

**Contribution to the body of knowledge:** The paper describes what we have done that set the scene of the entire GT research process. It provides input valuable to researchers new to the GT method and to give them the confidence to start. Issues of GT, in particular the role of literature review in GT is a significant barrier to many new GT researchers, as indicated by the experience of past researchers as well as the key researcher of the current study. Once the scene is set through the just do it dictum of Glaser (2012), one realises that the GT method is indeed liberating, although the specter of drowning in textual data is also real. The role of literature is to provide additional data and theoretical sensitivity to prevent such drowning and keep the researcher and the study afloat, whilst memo-writing provides the platform to capture emerging concepts and hypotheses.

**Implications for practice:** At this juncture, we can only provide glimpses of the concerns of an Orang Asli student and how she survived the deficit theorising. Understanding the context of Orang Asli students is an important initial phase of this research. It sets the scene from the learners' perspective, what concerns them as learners and how these concerns are resolved. This is in contrast to what other stakeholders think about the problem and its resolution. In a collaborative and learning leadership (Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom & Anderson, 2012), stakeholders must consider the Orang Asli's strengths, their social and cultural capital in leading the learning of the community's children. Leveraging on their strengths and continuous improvement will contribute to the sustainability of the Orang Asli education, and the thriving of the community. Still, we are cognisant that, "While the researcher cannot know which concepts, or indeed if any, will have the same emphasis once data collection and analysis proceed, it is likely that some will remain to be integrated into new interpretations of relationships and processes" (McCallin, 2006a, p.16).

In the final analysis, a GT is judged by four criteria: fit, work, relevant and modifiable (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Hoda, 2011; Hakel, 2015; Flint, 2005). The theory fits when it matches the realities, as experienced by the subjects, practitioners and researchers in the substantive area; it works when it explains, predicts, and interprets what is happening; it is relevant if it fits and works thus offering explanations of the basic process in the substantive area, and the theory should be readily modifiable when new data present variations in emergent properties and categories. Generating hypotheses "requires evidence enough to establish a suggestion – not an excessive piling of evidence to establish a proof" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p.39).

**Further work:** Subsequent upon the initial scene setting, further data collection was guided by the constant comparative method of the GT process. Additional data was collected through in-depth interviews with more tertiary level student participants. Theirs were the guiding voices for the GT development of leading learning process among the Orang Asli students. It must be emphasized that the conceptual model of leading learning has not been thoroughly exploited at this initial stage of the study. As more data was collected from 16 participants, the constant

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comparative coding and memoing process revealed new categories and the extent of each category that defines its properties and dimensions.

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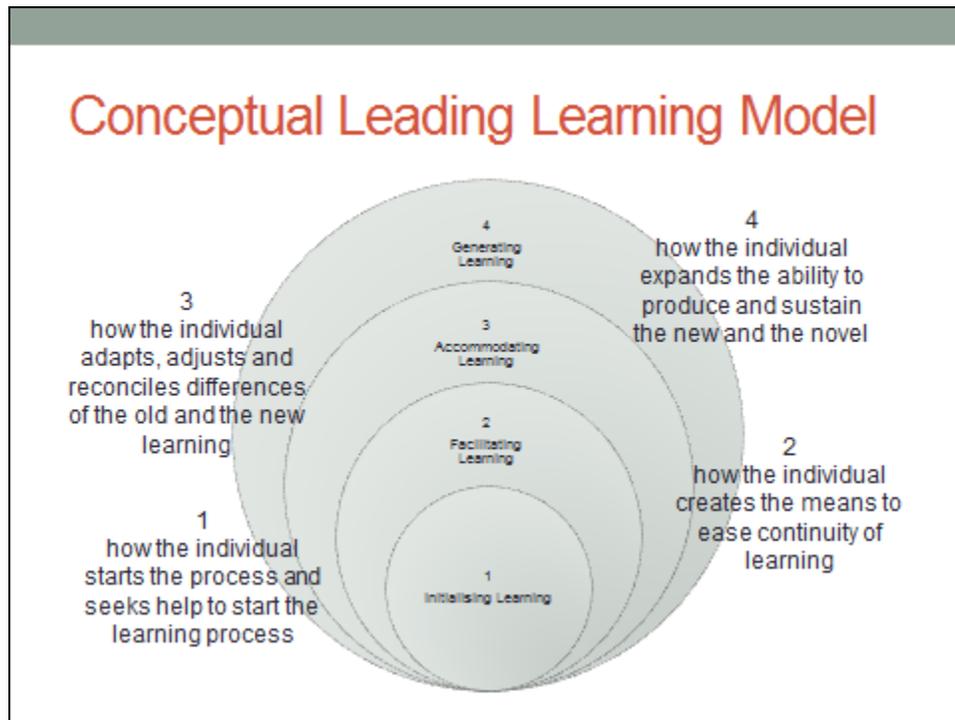
**Figure 1**



**Figure 1: Conceptual Model of Leading Learning**