

Orang Asli Student Icons: An Innovative Teaching Method for Orang Asli Students

Rohaida Nordin^{1*}, Muhamad Sayuti bin Hassan @ Yahya² and Ibrahim Danjuma^{1,3}

¹*Faculty of Law, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 43600 UKM, Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia*

²*Faculty of Human Sciences, Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, 35900 UPSI, Tanjong Malim, Perak, Malaysia*

³*Faculty of Law, Misau Campus, Bauchi State University Gadau, Nigeria*

ABSTRACT

To enhance learning among the Orang Asli, the Faculty of Law of the National University of Malaysia, popularly known as Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), organised a motivational programme for Orang Asli students in November, 2014. The programme was facilitated by Orang Asli Student Icons, 12 Orang Asli students representing various faculties in UKM. This article discusses the role of the Orang Asli Student Icons in strengthening the level of awareness and motivation among the participants. To gather their insight into their role as facilitator in transferring knowledge and ideas to fellow Orang Asli students, a questionnaire was developed and administered following the motivational programme. In addition to the introduction and conclusion, this article covers four main areas. First, it discusses challenges and barriers within the Orang Asli education system. This is followed by an in-depth description of the motivational programme that was carried out. Third, a demographic analysis of the Orang Asli Student Icons is done. The final section of the article presents the findings and analysis of the Orang Asli Student Icons' perception of their role in knowledge transfer towards motivating and increasing awareness among Orang Asli students. This article concludes that the Orang Asli Student Icons have played

a significant role in addressing all challenges and barriers within the Orang Asli education system. This conclusion is supported by the positive feedback received from the participants and post-event statistics on student dropout among the participants involved in the programme.

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E-mail addresses:

rohaidanordin@ukm.edu.my (Rohaida Nordin),

sayuti@fsk.upsi.edu.my (Muhamad Sayuti bin Hassan @ Yahya),

idanjuma27@gmail.com (Ibrahim Danjuma)

*Corresponding author

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INTRODUCTION

‘Orang Asli’ is a Malay term which translates to mean ‘original people’ or ‘first people’. The Orang Asli are the descendants of the first inhabitants of Peninsular Malaysia 5,000 years ago (Masron, Masami & Ismail, 2013, p. 77). According to Masron et al. (2013, p. 77), the term was introduced by anthropologists and administrators to identify the 18 sub-ethnic groups, generally classified for official purposes, comprising the Negrito, Senoi and Proto-Malay. Nevertheless, the Orang Asli are not a homogeneous group, as each sub-group has its own language and culture and perceives itself as being different from the others (Masron et al., 2013, p.77; JAKOA, 2011-2015; Musa, 2011, p. 48). Linguistically, some of the northern Orang Asli groups (especially the Senoi and Negrito) speak languages that are presently termed as Aslian languages, suggesting a historical link between Orang Asli groups and the indigenous peoples of Burma, Thailand and Indo-China (Masron et al., 2013, p.77).

According to a JAKOA report (2010), the population of Orang Asli is about 178,197, representing approximately 0.6% of the total Malaysian population (Kardooni, Kari, & Yusup, 2014, p. 283). Most Orang Asli live in rural and remote areas. Thus, they are frequently excluded from mainstream development (Nordin & Witbrodt, 2012, p. 210; Nordin, Yahya, & Witbrodt, 2012, p. 528). Due to their geographical location, the Orang Asli do not have access to favourable infrastructure or quality education (*Laporan Status*, 2010).

After gaining independence in 1957, the government of Malaysia adopted aggressive measures to improve the life and conditions of its citizenry (Abdullah, Mamat, Amirzal, & Ibrahim, 2013, p. 118). Abdullah et al. (2013, p.118) stated that the programmes initiated, improved and influenced the lifestyle of the populace in general. However, despite all these measures, the development of education among the Orang Asli communities has yet to achieve the expected results. After examining the performance of primary and secondary school Orang Asli students, it was observed that Orang Asli students remained far behind compared with students from other ethnic backgrounds in Malaysia. The Malaysian government launched an initiative, the National Key Results Area (NKRA) in 2009 with the intention of providing all students with basic writing and reading skills by the year 2012 (Abdullah et al., 2013, p. 119). Other programmes introduced by the Malaysian Government included the Educational Development Action Plan for the Orang Asli Community, the Mini Hostels Programme, the Education Assistance Scheme of 2010, the Special Awareness Programme for the Parents of Orang Asli Students and the Friendly Teaching Programme (JAKOA, 2011). Accordingly, the Ministry of Education proposed a unique curriculum for Orang Asli by establishing and developing a suitable syllabus such as the Curriculum for Orang Asli and Penan (KAP) and the Comprehensive Special Model School Programme (K9) in selected Orang Asli

schools (*Pelan Pembangunan Pendidikan Malaysia 2013-2025*).

Notwithstanding the efforts made by the Malaysian Government, the standard of education of the Orang Asli has not been fruitful. It is recognised that there remains a high number of dropouts from both primary and secondary schools, coupled with all-round poor academic performance. It was further noted that only 880 Orang Asli students had completed their tertiary education between 1971 and 2010 (Abdullah et al., 2013, p. 119).

The Research Group on Indigenous Peoples, Faculty of Law, UKM conducted a motivational programme entitled 'Moh Hek Masuk U' for Orang Asli students from Raub, Pahang from the 14 to 16 November, 2014. This motivational programme was carried out as part of the Research Group's effort to assist the Orang Asli community in Raub. A total of 70 Orang Asli students travelled to UKM for the duration of the programme. The students were from SMK Tengku Kudin (40 students) and SK Satak in Raub (30 students). The Research Group worked with the Department of Orang Asli (JAKOA) and the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM) on this project.

The Research Group obtained the list of Orang Asli students in UKM from the Department of Student Services (JPPel), and 12 Orang Asli students accepted their appointment as Student Icons for the motivational programme. The appointments were created and endorsed by the Orang Asli student community owing to their

understanding of the language, the culture and present way of life of the Orang Asli. Also, these factors could be noted as having a much greater impact than those for non-Orang Asli. The Student Icons adopted the role of facilitator in various teachings and learning activities throughout the course of the programme and developed friendships with the participants. This helped the participants to feel comfortable and to cooperate in all the activities. Furthermore, the Student Icons also acted as translators for the Orang Asli participants when the message communicated by the teachers was unambiguous or unclear. The Student Icons, therefore, played a significant role as mediator, facilitating effective communication between the organisers, teachers and participants of the programme.

This article discusses and outlines the significant role of the Student Icons and the overall programme by sharing their experience and transfer of knowledge.

LITERATURE REVIEW

As highlighted in the introduction, despite the efforts of the Malaysian Government in improving the standard and level of education among the Orang Asli, issues remain which bedevil the success of these efforts. Many scholars have examined these issues and provided recommendations. The following paragraphs discuss the issues and recommendations proposed to mitigate potential barriers that will enable a successful initiative to improve the standard and level of Orang Asli education.

It is important to mention that most scholars identify communication as being one of the main criteria for a successful teaching and learning process. Educationalists agree that the teaching and learning process encompasses positive communication between both students and teachers and is not merely a one-way flow of knowledge from teachers to students (Abdullah et al., 2013, p.122). It contains interaction between teachers and students and effective interaction with teaching tools and methods used to attain definite Orang Asli contact (Haron & Boon, 1985). Abdullah et al. (2013), in the study entitled "Teaching and Learning Problems of Orang Asli Education", pointed out that there are many factors responsible for the educational setback of Orang Asli. These include, among others, the existing language barrier between indigenous Orang Asli children and non-indigenous teachers, culture, poverty, the availability of teaching and learning facilities, the influence of dropout friends and early marriage (Abdullah et al., 2013). The replies received from the Orang Asli students during the interview process carried out by Abdullah et al. (2013) showed that some teachers (non-Orang Asli) within the Orang Asli community were unable to establish effective communication with students during the teaching process. Furthermore, according to this study, some students could not comprehend the lessons delivered by the teachers in the Malay language. This is the medium of instruction given that most of the teachers are Malay and do not speak indigenous languages.

In other words, most teachers within the Orang Asli communities are not able to effectively communicate in any of the Orang Asli languages such as Temiar. Furthermore, most teachers have little knowledge of the customs and culture of the Orang Asli community that could potentially play a vital role in improving the standard of education in the area.

Nor, Roslan, Mohamed, Hassan, Ali and Manaf (2011, p. 45), reported poor academic performance among Orang Asli students in both the Primary Achievement Test results and at the Secondary Certificate level. The situation could be attributed to the inability of the Orang Asli students to follow or understand the lessons. This may also be attributed to the lessons being taught in the Malay language, inadequate school facilities, the educational system itself, the curriculum being above their level and teachers who are mostly non-Orang Asli and who are not familiar with the socio-cultural needs of the Orang Asli (Nor et al., 2011, p. 52).

Comparable results were observed for a programme initiated by the Department of Orang Asli Affairs (JHEOA), currently known as JAKOA. Their teaching staff were not adequately trained and therefore possessed little knowledge of the Orang Asli; the Malay teachers (non-Orang Asli) at the central primary schools had limited knowledge of Orang Asli culture and traditions (Asian Indigenous & Tribal Peoples Network, 2008). According to Adnan and Saad (n. d.), teachers of Orang Asli students need a certain level of skills and

proficiency in their students' mother tongues to encourage and intensify progressive intercultural exchange.

In a related development, recent research by Wahab, Mustapha and Ahamd (2016, p. 371) revealed that the main problem associated with the educational backwardness of the Orang Asli community is poor interaction between the non-Orang Asli teachers and the Orang Asli students. This caused poor understanding and apprehension of lessons, leading to significant exam failure. Teaching and communicating in a language that is alien to Orang Asli students requires careful consideration regarding planning, application and evaluation, and teachers should be trained in indigenous teaching (Wahab et al., 2016, p. 371). Wahab et al. (2016, p. 372) recommended that applying native languages and cultures of an indigenous society (in this case, Orang Asli society) in the classroom teaching environment would greatly help to obtain good results in academic education, improve school attendance, promote positive behaviour of the students and reduce the number of student dropouts.

Renganathan (2013) highlighted the problems that Orang Asli students face in learning English in schools. He stated that while teachers in Malaysian schools are trained to teach English as a second language, most of these teachers find it problematic to acclimate their teaching to accommodate the Orang Asli students' background and situation. He stressed that to improve learning among Orang Asli

students, the teacher needs to be trained in various techniques and methods due to the language and cultural differences in order to enable Orang Asli students to benefit from the lesson (Renganathan, 2013, p. 150).

A similar problem was also observed in the Indigenous Australian community. There is an enormous collection of work and evidence that advocates that non-indigenous teachers are not accustomed to teaching indigenous children. Notwithstanding their sincere intentions and commitment towards teaching, Santoro, Reid, Crawford and Simpson (2011, p. 65) opined that most of the teachers had insufficient understanding of suitable pedagogy and the complexities of indigenous cultures, character and knowledge. Furthermore, there is a severe lack of knowledge and understanding of students' out-of-school living conditions and lives, the knowledge of which can facilitate or impede the students' educational success. Children are coming to school who have not had enough sleep at night or who have not had breakfast and are potentially hungry (Santoro et al., 2011, p. 69). As a result, the students cannot concentrate in class, and their teachers who are non-indigenous have no idea why. More so, there are non-indigenous staff in schools and universities whose teaching and course materials for their respective subjects are designed with little or no input from indigenous practitioners (Santoro et al., 2011, p. 73).

To address the problems as highlighted by Santoro et al. (2011), it is evident that there is a need to involve indigenous teachers in teaching and in the overall

learning process for indigenous people. This is because teachers who have grown up and completed their schooling as ‘indigenous’ learners speak the same common language of indigenous students and have a wealth of experience and knowledge about the pedagogy that is likely to be successful for indigenous students. They understand indigenous world views and have first-hand experience of the challenges facing indigenous students in mainstream schooling systems. It is further suggested that indigenous teachers can potentially play important roles as educators and mentors to non-indigenous teachers and in pre-service teacher education.

As the primary outcome from many of the studies conducted in Australia and Malaysia on the challenges and barriers faced by the current education system for indigenous people, several opportunities as discussed, exist to enhance the educational process for indigenous people (including the Orang Asli). These include involving indigenous teachers or facilitators as mentors, role models and educators, thereby

improving the teacher-student relationship and continual learning process throughout the students’ academic life.

METHOD

Demographic Analysis of Orang Asli Student Icon

The Orang Asli Student Icons included three males and nine females as listed in Table 1 and shown in Figure 1. All 12 Student Icons were from different sub-ethnic groups; eight were Jakun, with one person each from Semelai, Jahut, Kuala and Temuan sub-ethnics, as shown in Table 2 and Figure 2. Because of the diversity of these sub-ethnic backgrounds, the Student Icons could use different approaches in communicating with the Orang Asli participants.

Table 1
Gender of Orang Asli Student Icons

Gender	Number
Male	3
Female	9

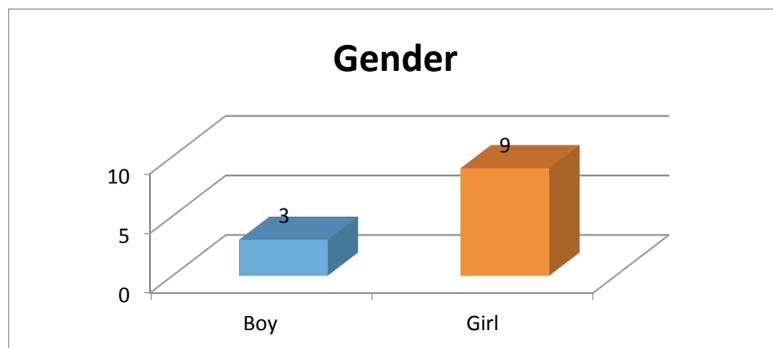


Figure 1. The Orang Asli Student Icons included three males and nine females

Table 2
Sub-Ethnic of Orang Asli Student Icons

Sub-ethnic	Number
Kuala	1
Semelai	1
Jakun	8
Temuan	1
Jahut	1

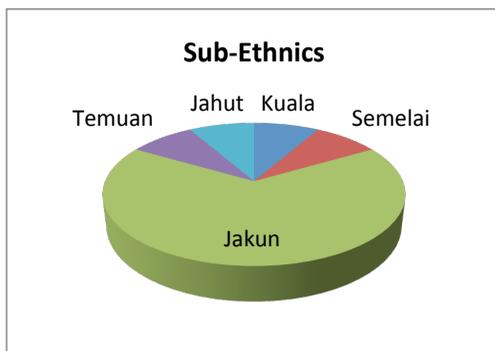


Figure 2. Sub-ethnic group distribution

In addition to the ethnic differences, the level of diversity was apparent based on the differences in each Student Icons' respective field of study. As shown in Table 3 and Figure 3, four Student Icons were studying in the Faculty of Economics and Management (FEM), four in the Faculty of Science and Technology (FST), three in the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities (FSSH) and one in the Institute for Environment and Development (Lestari). The level of diversity of their respective fields of study enhanced the value of the programme, as each Student Icon applied a high degree of interest in sharing their experiences in the different fields. One of the benefits of the programme was that it enabled those

participating in the programme to study at UKM or any other university of their choosing.

Table 3
Faculties of Orang Asli Student Icons

Faculty	Number
Faculty of Social Science and Humanities (FSSH)	3
Institute of Environment and Development (Lestari)	1
Faculty of Economic and Management (FEM)	4
Faculty of Science and Technology (FST)	4
Jahut	1

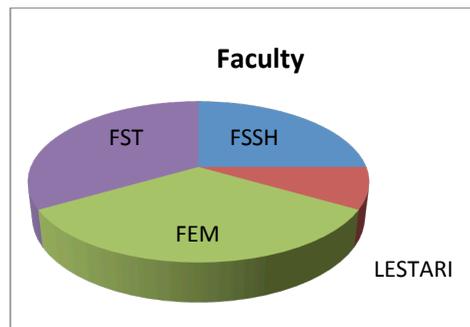


Figure 3. Distribution by faculty

Furthermore, their capability was not only in the diversity of their areas of specialisation but additionally in the various levels of their studies. Table 4 and Figure 4 show that two of the Student Icons were postgraduate students, while the rest were undergraduates. The difference in their level of studies assisted them to combine their knowledge and experience in teaching and learning, in interacting with the Orang Asli participants.

Table 4
Study levels of Orang Student Icons

Study Level	Number
Undergraduate	10
Postgraduate	2

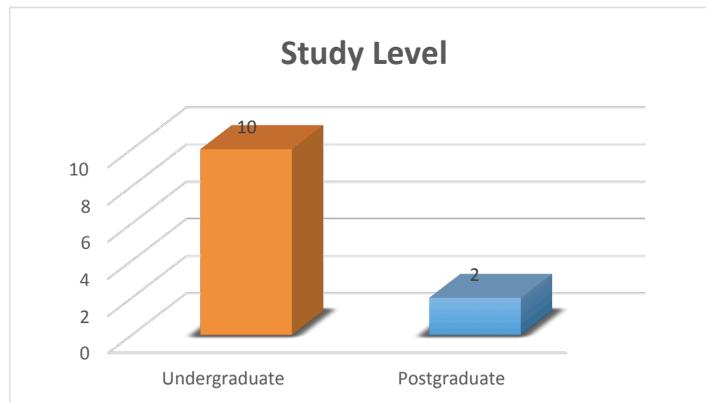


Figure 4. Nature of studies of Orang Asli Student Icons

Objectives

In consideration of the challenges and barriers (refer to Section 2), a key outcome of the programme was to confirm the effectiveness of Orang Asli Student Icon and how using Orang Asli students as icons could enhance the process of learning among Orang Asli students as it enabled easy and quick building of rapport between students, teachers and facilitators.

The 12 Orang Asli Student Icons were appointed to facilitate the teaching and learning process and to ensure effective and plausible communication was expertly executed with Orang Asli students. All 12 Orang Asli Student Icons played a significant role in creating and fostering

enthusiasm among the participants to enhance their motivation and confidence in developing themselves through their studies. This article discusses and outlines the significant role of the Student Icons and the overall programme by sharing their experience.

Questionnaire

A survey questionnaire to obtain the Student Icons' perception of their roles was developed and distributed to the 12 Student Icons appointed to participate in the programme. The questionnaire was considered the most suitable tool to assess the perceptions and opinions of the Student Icons and the extent of their role in the

Orang Asli education programme. The questionnaire comprised six questions:

- i. Why did you accept the appointment as a Student Icon for the Orang Asli Students Motivational Programme?
- ii. What role have you played as a Student Icon in this programme?
- iii. How did you play a role in increasing the motivation of the participants of this programme? Give examples, if necessary.
- iv. How does your role as a Student Icon assist you in improving your soft skills and enhancing your existing knowledge?
- v. Do you agree that this programme should only involve Orang Asli Student Icons as mentors? Why?
- vi. Do you agree that Icons who are non-Orang Asli would not be able to play the role as effectively as played by Orang Asli Student Icons? Why?

Another survey questionnaire was developed to collect feedback from the participants relating to the effectiveness of the overall programme and whether the programme helped to increase their own personal

motivation to pursue further studies at a higher level. The questionnaire was distributed to participants on the final day of the programme, 16 November, 2014. The methodology that was adopted also provided relevant information to the participants before they answered the survey questions. This was primarily to ensure that the participants fully understood the context and meaning of the questions before completing the survey.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Perspective Analysis of Orang Asli Student Icons

As discussed in Section 3, the primary objective of this article was to examine the perception of the Student Icons regarding their respective roles in facilitating the learning process and advancing and strengthening education among the Orang Asli participants of the programme. The results of the survey questionnaire obtained from the Student Icons are as follows.

1. Why did you accept the appointment as a Student Icon for the Orang Asli Students Motivational Programme?

Table 5
Reason(s) for accepting the appointment by Orang Asli Student Icons

No.	Reason	No. of Icon
1.	Help in advancing Orang Asli education	5
2.	Give encouragement and create awareness about education among the Orang Asli	2
3.	A sense of responsibility towards the community itself	2
4.	Be an example to the Orang Asli community	1
5.	Provide service to the community	2
6.	Prove the ability of the Orang Asli	1
7.	Show pride in being Orang Asli	1
8.	Build new friendships	1
9.	Improve own soft skills	1
10.	Gain new experience	2
11.	Help the organisers	1

Table 5 shows 11 reasons why the Student Icons accepted their appointment, with several providing more than one reason.

Table 5 shows that most of the Student Icons accepted the appointment to help and develop the Orang Asli community in the field of education. Also, they wanted to serve their community and their nation. This intention was further evidenced in one of the answers provided by a Student Icon:

I accepted the appointment as an Orang Asli Student Icon for this programme because I want to help and promote education among Orang Asli since we are still far behind in the field of education. This is because the percentage of students at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels are estimated as being less than 1% of the total population of the Orang Asli community in Malaysia. Hence, our responsibility as Student Icons is to help our community regarding education.

The above response corresponds with the Abdullah et al. (2013) study, which found that only 880 Orang Asli students completed their tertiary education between 1971 and 2010. This clearly demonstrates how the Orang Asli are indeed far behind with regards to education compared with other ethnic groups in Malaysia.

The Student Icons accepted the appointment to serve as role models, to prove the ability of Orang Asli and to show pride in their ethnicity. It was apparent that they accepted the appointment to boost confidence among the participants. This role was a tremendous contribution to the benefit of the Orang Asli. Furthermore, as observed in the study by Abdullah et al. (2013), the main reason affecting the poor showing in education among the Orang Asli is the influence of student dropouts; the students who drop out influence those still in school to do the same. Therefore, it is evident that having Orang Asli educators and facilitators

involved in teaching and learning activities or in similar motivational programmes carried out among the Orang Asli will only boost the confidence of Orang Asli students, helping them to focus on their studies and climb the academic ladder while following in the footsteps of their mentors.

There were also Student Icons who wanted to improve their skills by participating in the programme. One response was, “to gain experience and develop my soft skills.” Another was, “I accepted the appointment as an Orang Asli Student Icon for this motivational programme because I wanted to improve my soft skills. Also, to assist the participants from SK Satak and SMK Tengku Kudin by sharing my experiences as a student of UKM.” Santoro et al. (2011) explained that mature indigenous

learners who had completed their schooling as ‘indigenous’ learners speak the same language as indigenous students and have a wealth of experience and knowledge about pedagogy that is likely to benefit indigenous students. Thus, among the respondents were those who pointed out that they accepted the appointment to gain experience and to improve their skills. For if the Student Icons are to be appointed as teachers and facilitators someday, they would need to acquire a wealth of experience and knowledge about pedagogy to share with their Orang Asli students. This was echoed by Santoro and the other studies mentioned above.

2. What role have you played as a Student Icon in this programme?

Table 6
Role(s) of Orang Asli Student Icons

No.	Reason	No. of Icon
1.	Facilitator and Mediator between the organisers and Orang Asli students	1
2.	Building a relationship such as brother and sister/family	2
3.	Leading a group	2
4.	Guiding the Orang Asli	2
5.	Being the emcee	1
6.	Being an example of success to the Orang Asli	3
7.	Helping the programme to run smoothly	2
8.	Sharing knowledge, leading and monitoring the movement of students	1
9.	Providing motivation/encouragement/inspiration so that the Orang Asli students would continue with their schooling, considering themselves no different from other communities	7
10.	Understanding the existing problem within the Orang Asli community	1

Table 6 shows that there were 10 roles for the Student Icons. The 22 responses emphasised that most of the Student Icons played more than one role as a Student Icon for this programme.

Most of the Student Icons responded by saying that their role was to motivate, encourage and inspire the participants to continue their studies and to be more successful in the future. For example, one response was, “I inspired the Orang Asli students to succeed in their studies in order to help both their parents and the indigenous peoples.” Another comment was:

My role was to act not just as a counsellor or an Icon, but rather to build a relationship as between a brother and sister, provide encouragement and advice for them to keep learning and be more competitive while at school, and to consider themselves no different

from other societies while being proud to have been born Orang Asli.

The above responses confirmed what Adnan et al. (n. d.) proposed, that teachers of Orang Asli need some skills and proficiency in their students’ mother tongue to encourage these students and to intensify continuous learning and intercultural exchanges.

The Student Icons responded by saying that they played a pivotal role in being an example of Orang Asli success. They also played a role in guiding the participants, establishing friendships with the participants and trying to understand the problems faced by the Orang Asli. Furthermore, the Student Icons played a role in facilitating the smooth running of the overall programme.

3. How did you play a role in increasing the motivation of the participants of this programme? Give examples, if necessary.

Table 7
Motivational approaches adopted by Orang Asli Student Icons

No.	Reason	No. of Icon
1.	Storytelling and sharing life experiences, particularly success in furthering my studies at university	7
2.	Providing advice and encouragement to continue studies	7
3.	Creating awareness on the importance of education	2
4.	Increasing motivation through cultural performances	2
5.	Cooperating with the Orang Asli participants	1
6.	Encouraging participants to come forward	1
7.	Observing the situation and understanding the problem	1
8.	Showing good values	1
9.	Teaching how to communicate well	1

Table 7 showed that there were nine approaches that the Student Icons applied to motivate participants. The 23 responses reflected that several Student Icons adopted more than one method.

It is evident that most of the Student Icons took to storytelling and sharing their life experiences, especially about the success they achieved by furthering their studies at university and encouraging the participants to do likewise. One of the attributes of a good teacher is knowing which method is best for teaching students. For instance, while some students may be visual learners and some auditory, others may be better at reading and writing, or even kinaesthetic learning. A teacher can correctly and quickly identify which method is the best for a student if he or she happens to know the culture, custom and traditions of the student. In the same way, the Student Icons identified storytelling and sharing life experiences as the most appropriate method of imparting knowledge and encouraging their fellow Orang Asli. This was possible because they were part of the community and well acquainted with the customs, traditions and way of life of the Orang Asli.

One of the answers was, “I chose to share a terrible experience... I had done wrong and failed to gain anything but with effort and perseverance, I was able to bounce back from failure.” Not limited to sharing experiences, the Student Icons also used this opportunity to raise awareness of the importance of education for a better future

by emphasising that Orang Asli should change their attitudes towards education.

Furthermore, seven of the Student Icons used the motivational programme as a platform to provide advice and encouragement to the participants to continue their education to the highest level. One Icon used the method of “increase[ing] the motivation of the participants by increasing their spirit of desire to continue their studies.” Examples like this received positive reaction from the Orang Asli students. This is further emphasised in another response, “I found that they feel good and want to continue their studies ... they were excited when I cited that many Orang Asli have succeeded in pursuing studies at universities and now stand at par with those from other communities.”

There were various other methods adopted by the Icons, as depicted in Table 7. Some responded that another way that they chose was to establish confidence among the participants to pose questions and to improve communication. As reported by Wahab et al. (2016) in his study, one of the problems encountered by the non-Orang Asli teachers was difficulty in elucidating certain terms to Orang Asli students and making them understand the context due to the language barrier. Thus, having Student Icons to facilitate the motivational programme greatly helped the Student Icons to pose questions and to better communicate with the Orang Asli students. This is because they spoke the same language. Confidence

and active communication is essential for motivating Orang Asli students.

4. How does your role as a Student Icon assist you in improving your soft skills and enhancing your existing knowledge?

Table 8
Skills and knowledge acquired from the role as a Student Icon

No.	Reason	No. of Icon
1.	Increase/Improve communication skill	7
2.	Enhance leadership	4
3.	Enhance collaboration/teamwork	4
4.	Increase level of confidence	3
5.	Learn how to organise a programme efficiently	1
6.	Improve social aspect and accountability	1
7.	Irrelevant answer	3

Table 8 shows that a total of seven Student Icons responded that their skills improved communication among the participants. Most of the Student Icons emphasised communication, as this was the one most important aspect in helping to shape the future of the participants. One of the Student Icons stated that “weak or inadequate communication nowadays is a cause of difficulty in getting a job.” Through this programme, the Student Icons themselves were inspired to be more confident in speaking in front of audiences.

Several of the Student Icons applied some other aspects of their soft skills. For example, four Icons responded that their leadership qualities and teamwork

were strengthened among the Orang Asli participants. These aspects are significant in shaping future leaders. The Student Icons also paid attention to other kinds of soft skills, particularly in raising the confidence of the participants to move forward in life.

One of the answers emphasised, “the experience we have received in facilitating this programme has improved our knowledge and soft skills,” while another stated, “participating in a variety of activities helps develop the potential within participants and expertise within Student Icons.”

5. Do you agree that this programme should only involve Orang Asli Student Icons as mentors for the participants?

Table 9

Perception of the involvement of only Orang Asli Student Icons as mentors for the participants

No.	Reason (Agree)	No. of Icon
1.	Provides evidence and gives encouragement that Orang Asli too can be successful	8
2.	The similarity of culture, customs, background and life experience allow effective communication and interaction between Student Icons and participants	6
3.	Facilitates communication/helps students to communicate well	5
4.	Share success	1
5.	Share experiences	1
6.	Opportunity to assist one's community	1

Table 9 shows that all 12 Student Icons unanimously agreed that the programme should involve Orang Asli Student Icons as mentors to the participants. Icons believed that the Icons represented Orang Asli success. With this example in mind, the participants would be more enthusiastic and realise that they too could be just as successful. One Icon explained that Orang Asli mentors could make a significant contribution to their community i.e. Orang Asli Icons can motivate and encourage Orang Asli students to succeed in their studies to the highest level, like the Icons had themselves. Furthermore, they believed that the Orang Asli Icons could make a greater impact on Orang Asli students as they understood the current context of Orang Asli better themselves.

As many as six Icons stated why it was better to involve Orang Asli, saying they came from the same culture, tradition and background and shared many life experiences. This would elicit easier acceptance from students while facilitating better interaction, approach and partnership. In one response, an Icon reiterated that the involvement of the Orang Asli themselves

was necessary because of “the similarities between the Icons and Orang Asli students. Therefore, discussion with Orang Asli students in the programme is more open because they consider the Icons to be members of their family.” Another stated, “In addition to cultural similarities, participants are more comfortable sharing their concerns with the Orang Asli Icons because the Icons had also faced the same problems at some point.” Therefore, the Student Icons’ approach towards the Orang Asli students may be more beneficial as they were already aware of the customs and beliefs as well as the perceptions and attitudes of Orang Asli in general.

The involvement of the Orang Asli as Student Icons is essential because of the ease of communication with the participants. A total of five Icons confirmed this in their response. According to the five Icons, participants can share experiences, share their success stories and inculcate a sense of responsibility in relation with the Icons. In this regard, the Icons hoped to inspire them to follow their advice to succeed. One of the Icons stated, “Maybe by seeing the success of the Icons, by setting foot into

their university, we can inspire them also to strive to get a place in any university or college.”

The above responses from the Student Icons tally with what Abdullah et al. pointed out in their study, that the main problems associated with the educational setback of Orang Asli are predominantly language barriers and differences in culture and customs between the teachers and the Orang Asli students. Other studies like Santoro et al. (2011), Wahab et al. (2016), Adnan et al.

(n. d.), Nor et al. (2011) and Renganathan (2013), featured under Section 2 of this article, unanimously acknowledged this fact. Thus, most of the teachers who are non-indigenous find it difficult communicating with indigenous students such as the Orang Asli students and are not accustomed to their customs and traditions.

6. Do you agree that icons who are non-Orang Asli students would not be able to play the role as effectively as played by Orang Asli Student Icons? Why?

Table 10
Perception of the involvement of Non- Orang Asli Student Icons

No.	Reason (Agree)	No. of Icon
1.	Non-Orang Asli students do not understand the life, situation, problems, desires, feelings and traditional beliefs of the Orang Asli	4
2.	The Orang Asli can inspire and make the participants realise the importance of education	1
3.	Participants would be more comfortable to communicate and share experiences with Icons who are also Orang Asli	2
4.	Orang Asli students have more sense of responsibility to help other Orang Asli	1
5.	Orang Asli students are more sensitive, easy to understand and influence the community	1
6.	Every individual has a different approach, but Orang Asli have the advantage because they belong to the same ethnic community	1
Reason (Disagree)		
1.	Non-Orang Asli should also come together to help the Orang Asli	1
2.	Everybody irrespective of ethnic background could perform at the same level	1
3.	Everyone has different skills and knowledge to be shared	1
4.	Every programme, if done responsibly and with sincerity will succeed, the key is cooperation	1
5.	Every human being has advantages and disadvantages	1

Table 10 shows six reasons given by those who agreed and five reasons given by those who disagreed with the statement “If Icon selection were done among non-Orang Asli

students, they would not be able to play the role as effectively as Orang Asli Icons.”

One of the Student Icons was adamant about the ability of Orang Asli Student Icons

to help other Orang Asli. Their question was, “If this programme involves Orang Asli students, why should Student Icons be appointed from among non-Orang Asli?” The Student Icons also confirmed via the questionnaire that Icons from among non-Orang Asli students would not understand the problems faced by Orang Asli students as they did not understand the customs and beliefs of the Orang Asli. The Icons also reiterated that the programme was used to maximise assistance to their people rather than to the non-Orang Asli. However, this stance does not question the ability of the non-Orang Asli as the Student Icons merely believed that the impact of the partnership would be better if Orang Asli Icons were involved.

On the other hand, there were others who had an alternative perspective on this matter. One of the Icons disagreed that non-Orang Asli students could not play the role of Orang Asli Student Icon effectively. This Icon believed that “every human being must be able to carry out the duties assigned to them to the best of their ability. Although different regarding religion and culture, it cannot obstruct the relationship between people.” Several other Icons supported this view, believing that “non-Orang Asli students exhibit and perform their duties in the best possible manner and can lead the Orang Asli students.” It indirectly affirmed the view of these Icons that every individual has advantages and disadvantages that can be of benefit to others.

Therefore, it can be concluded that although the Orang Asli Student Icons had

greater capability in performing the role, the ability of non-Orang Asli students to perform the same role could not be denied. However, given a choice, Orang Asli Icons should be considered in preference to non-Orang Asli Icons in teaching the community.

Perspective Analysis Among Orang Asli Student/Participant

A survey questionnaire was developed to collect feedback from the participants relating to the effectiveness of the overall programme and whether the programme helped to increase their own personal motivation to pursue further studies at a higher level. From the replies received, 69 participants agreed and strongly agreed that they felt motivated to continue their schooling following the programme. Furthermore, 69 participants also agreed and strongly agreed to pursue their studies to a higher level in the forthcoming year.

The programme was a success as all the participants were satisfied with it. All the participants provided positive comments, and no negative comments were received. Most of the participants replied that overall, the programme had been fun and that they were more than happy to have been given the opportunity to participate in the programme. Here is a sample of the comments received: “The programme is very exciting, and I’m happy because I made a lot of friends”; “Everyone in the hall was very kind and affectionate towards us”; “I’m interested in this programme because the programme is the best and may serve as a lesson for me. The programme contained a lot of activities

that were fun, and all the Student Icons made me feel excited and motivated during this programme”; and “This programme has inspired me to continue my studies.”

CONCLUSION

To address the challenges and barriers to education experienced by the Orang Asli, indigenous teachers should be involved in the teaching and learning process undertaken by Orang Asli students. This is because teachers who have grown up and completed their schooling as ‘indigenous’ learners speak the same language of indigenous students and have a wealth of experience and knowledge about the pedagogy that is likely to be successful for indigenous students. They understand indigenous world views and have first-hand experience of many of the challenges faced by indigenous students in the mainstream schooling systems.

In this motivational programme, the role of indigenous teacher was played by 12 Orang Asli Student Icons. All the Orang Asli Student Icons played a significant role in advancing and strengthening education among the Orang Asli participants of the programme. The perception of the Icons, as highlighted in this article, is that the Orang Asli participants cooperated and demonstrated a positive response when assisted by other Orang Asli. It was further shown that the Orang Asli Student Icons played an enormous and significant role in facilitating the teaching and learning process of the Orang Asli participants by eradicating all the barriers and challenges identified and discussed in Section 2 of this article.

The effectiveness and success of this programme could be measured from the positive feedback received from the 12 Orang Asli Student Icons and the 69 Orang Asli participants. To collect quantifiable information in support of the programme, the programme organiser contacted SMK Tengku Kudin to obtain the actual number of Orang Asli students who continued their schooling to a higher level when the school opened in January of the following year. From a total of 70 students, 61 had continued with their studies¹. The actual dropout rate was approximately 13%, with 87% of the participants of the programme held at the university continuing their education in secondary school.

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¹Letter from SMK Tengku Kudin dated 5 March, 2015

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