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# *The Promise of Lifelong Learning in The Digital Age for Orang Asli in Malaysia*

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Learning has now shifted from being a luxury to a necessity, particularly in light of the needs and advancements of the current century. Education, in modern days, has been innovated and is no longer confined to classroom settings; it is now accessible to all ages. Malaysia has also adopted this vision through the Malaysia Education Blueprint (2013–2025), focusing on the ease and accessibility of learning at any point in life (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). However, this is not the case for the Orang Asli of Peninsular Malaysia. While the schooling system has always presented a challenge for these communities, the current remote learning situation, with its reliance on updated technologies, has further excluded them in a world where basic digital skills are fundamental to social and economic life.

The obstacles are both practical and systemic. Many Orang Asli villages are located in remote areas where Internet access is either spotty or completely absent. Even where there is coverage, the cost of devices and a stable connection is often beyond the means of families already struggling financially. These barriers were clearly brought to light during the COVID-19 pandemic, with reports stating that many Orang Asli children were excluded from online learning due to the absence of electricity, laptops, or internet access (Astro AWANI, 2022; Wikilmpact, 2021). These problems are not solely confined to these children. Adults in Orang Asli communities, who would otherwise take advantage of online programs or training in digital skills, are also disadvantaged, as they have limited ability to engage with the deep-seated culture of lifelong learning (Rahim et al., 2020).

However, gaining access to information is just one part of the problem. Focused and practical perpetuity education is an effective method, but its implementation is usually neglected. Studies show that visually oriented and group-centred approaches are the most effective in fostering learning as well as strengthening learner ICT skills (Ibrahim & Yusoff, 2022; Kamsin et al., 2023). Sadly, most content available on digital platforms is aimed at the general public and does not adequately consider indigenous knowledge, language, and culture. Learning materials that do not address the cultural realities of the Orang Asli communities only serve to marginalise the learners rather than empower them.



As efforts to address the digital divide begin to emerge, a few initiatives have started to fill the gaps by creatively aligning digital skills training with local contexts. One example is the Asia Pacific University's Knowledge Transfer Programme. This programme integrates workshops on digital literacy within Orang Asli communities and emphasises sustainability (Asia Pacific University of Technology and Innovation, 2023). Another is the Telecentre Programme, which integrates ICT hubs within rural areas and provides opportunities for people to access, share, learn, and participate in the digital realm in a community setting (Rahim et al., 2020). These initiatives have demonstrated that digital lifelong learning can be tailored to meet the needs of indigenous communities and reshaped to address their unique requirements.

Promoting lifelong learning for the Orang Asli people will depend on much more than technology. Yes, technology is essential, but so is the technology's mode of delivery that respects, acknowledges, and integrates the local culture and knowledge systems. In this case, partnerships among the government, higher learning institutions, and civil society are greatly needed, as they can help develop learning systems that are not only digitally accessible but also culturally inclusive and relevant, integrating systems of skill development, heritage preservation, and identity formation. Such partnerships can shift the perception of digital learning from a constraint to a vital tool for growth, once seamless collaboration is achieved.

For the Orang Asli people, the digital age presents both challenges and opportunities. Failure to address the issue of digitalisation will lead to even more entrenched inequalities and disadvantages for these people. However, wise and deliberate efforts can address the issue of inclusion, opening up new opportunities for acquiring education, employment, and preserving culture. Addressing the issue of Orang Asli people not being a part of Malaysia's lifelong learning journey is more than just a technological issue. It is a question of not just fairness, but fairness that underscores the country's obligation to secure a future in which learning is truly universal.



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