

## Differences In Teacher's Perspective On Academic Engagement Among Students Of Orang Asli And Non-Orang Asli Students

Mohd Azizul Sulaiman<sup>1</sup>, Nor Farhana Mohd Azmi<sup>2\*</sup>, Arifi Ridzuan<sup>3</sup>, Azwan Shah Aminuddin,<sup>4</sup> and Norhana Aini Saini<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1,2,3,5</sup>*Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Pahang, Bandar Tun Abdul Razak Jengka, Pahang, Malaysia*

azizul\_sulaiman@uitm.edu.my; norfa610@uitm.edu.my; arifi\_ridzuan@uitm.edu.my; azwanamin@uitm.edu.my

<sup>4</sup>*Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Kelantan, Machang, Kelantan Darul Naim, Malaysia*

norhanaaini@uitm.edu.my

**Abstract:** The standard of education among the Orang Asli people as an indigenous ethnic in Malaysia is still at a low level. Much of the Orang Asli people receive formal education only at the primary level. However, there is a significant trend where most students who completed their primary education will drop out from secondary school. Hence, only marginal amount of them have been successful in advancing their higher education in tertiary institutions. Such problems are commonly associated with several factors, including students' attitudes, awareness among parents about education, local culture, school leadership, school environment, and problems related to the teaching and learning process. Academic engagement seems to serve as an important social signal, eliciting supportive reciprocal reactions. Besides that, engagement is also a good forecaster of children's long-term academic achievement (Skinner et al., 1998) and their eventual completion of school (Connell, Spencer & Aber, 1994). Relating back to the case scenario, the academic engagement among Orang Asli is knowingly poor. Hence, if they were being introduced with the curriculum and pedagogy (of learning) which are unsuitable with their interests, or if they are unrelated with their daily lives, these could be one of the reasons for them to be less interested to study or to focus in class (Haslinda, Lilia & Zanaton, 2015). For better understanding of this problem, a specific research will be carried out to study the academic engagement of Orang Asli students in Taman Negara Pahang. The objective of this study is to explore teacher's perspective on academic engagement among students of Orang Asli, an indigenous minority community in Malaysia. Differences of perceptions towards academic engagement among teachers who teach students of Orang Asli and non-Orang Asli students also explored. This survey study conducted among teachers who teach both students in Pahang School. The research focused on teacher perspectives based on the questions: 1. What are the level of involvement in academic engagement among Orang Asli students and non-Orang Asli students. 2. Is there any differences in teacher's perspective on academic engagement between Orang Asli students and non-Orang Asli students? A set of questionnaires distributed among teachers as samples. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. This study will hopefully give implication on the importance of teacher's role to enhance academic engagement among students of Orang Asli and normal students. The implications of the problems and teachers' attitudes are significantly associated with degrading interest among students on education, issues of attendance and students' academic performance.

**Keywords:** Academic engagement, Non Orang Asli Students, Orang Asli Students, Teachers.

### Introduction

'Orang Asli' is a Malay term which translates to mean 'original people' or 'first people'. Orang Asli ancestors have inhabited the Malay peninsula since the 8th century BC (Abdul Razaq & Zalizan, 2009). The Orang Asli are the descendants of the first inhabitants of Peninsular Malaysia 5,000 years ago (Masron, Masami & Ismail, 2013). In term of religion, Orang Asli refers to the indigenous peoples of Peninsular Malaysia who are not Malay Muslims, Malaysia's main ethnic group (Gomes, 2004). According to Masron et al. (2013), 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; JAKOA, 2011-2015; Musa, 2011).

According to a JAKOA report (2010), the population of Orang Asli is about 178,197, representing approximately 0.6% minority of the total Malaysian population (Kardooni, Kari, & Yusup, 2014). Most Orang Asli live in rural and remote areas. Thus, they are frequently excluded from mainstream development and most importantly educations (Nordin & Witbrodt, 2012). Due to their geographical location, the Orang Asli do not have access to favorable infrastructure or quality education (JAKOA, 2010). To boost the development of educations among Orang Asli, 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). Abdullah et al. (2013) stated that the programs 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.

To address the issues, government has embarked on a comprehensive development programs in efforts to develop the Orang Asli community since independence in 1957 (Kamarulzaman & Osman, 2008). JHEOA need to ensure that the Orang Asli community comes into the mainstream of the national economic development and the focus is to upgrade the quality of life of the Orang Asli community through educational programs and other programs (Nicholas, 2005). As a key mechanism towards the campaign of quality of life, education is the main agenda in the Orang Asli's development program (Mohd Tap, 1990).

This study was carried out in particularly focusing on gauging perspectives on teachers' in two different schools regarding on students' academic engagement. Two research questions were formed to direct the researcher towards the objective of this study.

## **Research Significance**

Having students that getting involves and engages in all learning activities is a dream for all teachers all over the world. By having this kind of students, the knowledge sharing will be much easier and fruitful. But, to do that, teacher must find ways to retain the student's attentions and engagement in learning process. To do that, teachers must understand the level of engagement and involvement of students in the learning process in and out of the classroom. Therefore, this study is so important to be conducted so that it can help teachers and students to get benefits from learning.

Minister of Education, Dr. Maszlee Malik (2019) has revealed that over 700 Orang Asli students dropped out of primary and secondary schools last year. According to him, this could be attributed to many factors, from disinterest in schooling to underage marriages among indigenous people in Malaysia. Losing interest of schools is the ultimate effect of lacking involvement in learning and can increase if not threaten well.

Other than that, schools and education board will also get benefits from this study where they can use the finding to treat the problem among student in getting involved in class. Indigenous people are known to hold their tradition very strongly where in that tradition, education is not a very popular culture. Therefore, schools and education board can use this study to help reduce this among indigenous students in Malaysia.

This study is very important and useful to a lot of people and agencies who take the indigenous people issues seriously especially in term of education. This is because, only through education, the indigenous people can change their life. As we know, indigenous students face tough challenges in most education systems, when they need to change their traditional lifestyle and pursue the academic goals. These are all not easy for them. Therefore this study can give important meaning to the government, schools, teachers and society in order to how to increase the engagement of learning among indigenous students.

## **Limitation of the Study**

The findings from this study is only focusing on students at the selected, therefore, it is not generalized to all categories of students. The respondents involved in this study consisted of 15 students from SK Lemoi and 15 students from SK Kg. Tun Razak, and the number of the respondents too small to

generalize the findings of this study. Little attention also was given on the method of data collection, self-administered questionnaire were distributed through online and respondents have the tendency to answering the questionnaire randomly without read and understand thoroughly the question asked.

## Literature Review

### Academic Engagement among Orang Asli Students

Academic engagement can be defined as a composite of specific classroom behaviors such as writing, participating in tasks, reading aloud, reading silently, talking about academics, and asking and answering questions (Greenwood et al., 1984). On the other hand, student engagement in higher education has certain differences when compared to student engagement in other school levels, especially the context of campus or social life. It was observed that the campus itself and campus activities have indirect effects on students especially in higher education (Gunuc, 2013). Such concepts as giving value to campus (university) or to education, sense of belonging and participation in campus activities are considered to be among important parts of student engagement (Gunuc & Kuzu, 2014) In this respect, Willms (2003) defines engagement as students' sense of belonging, accepting the value of school and active participation in school activities. Engagement in school is an important academic outcome in its own right. It can improve performance and validates positive expectations about academic abilities (Skinner, Zimmer-Gembeck & Connell, 1998).

We can see the nature of Orang Asli for their survival needs, most Orang Asli people are still depending on their natural environment as their financial sources and places for them to spend their leisure time. In the research conducted by Wan Afizi et al. (2014) in Kelantan, he discovered that the numbers of the Orang Asli children to school are quite worrying as some of them were reported to be absent for a month. The teachers can give more motivational support to the students who are more engaging in the class (Skinner & Belmont, 1993). The reason was that the students were needed to take care of their younger siblings as their parents went for work. Some of the students were reported to be working with their parents in the forest to make a living. These factors are the reasons of why the students are not able to keep up in their studies according to the lesson plans taught in school.

Common people or "non orang asli" as we speak, tend to view the Orang Asli community as unwise, unconfident, incapable of making decisions on their own, depending on others to do everything for them and lazy (Chupil & Joseph, 2003). They remain one of the poorest in the country because of poor education performance (Nadchatram, 2007). Due to frequent absences, most Orang Asli students are found to be left out far behind the others. In a study on Orang Asli people that was done by Mohamad Johdi Salleh et al. (2009) in Pahang and Selangor, they have discovered that the in-class activities that involves teaching and learning concept by the teachers, could lead the Orang Asli students to boredom and being uninterested. The students were said to be able to maintain their focus for as long as the first 15 minutes. After that, they will be distracted by teasing other students in class, or even running around and making noises even though the teachers is still around. Hence, the teaching would be hard to be executed formally. According to them, these Orang Asli students are more interested on the learning sessions that involves fun approaches and requires lots of movements rather than only thinking.

The truth is Orang Asli children are not to be left behind in the focus of national educational development because JAKOA had execute the government's short-term and long-term development plans (Zainal Abidin Hj Ali, 2012). According to JAKOA (2011), they had introduced the programmes such as Mini Hostels Program, Education Assistance Scheme, Friendly Teaching Programs and others, as well as special awareness programs for the parents of Orang Asli students. Despite the implementation of such efforts for the Orang Asli students, the students' academic performance is still at a very low level. Previous researchers such as Hasan Mat Nor (1997), Razaq Ahmad et al. (2011) and Hood Salleh Abdullah, Ramle (2010) had found that several factors have certain impact on the students' education. One of the factor is their culture of not taking education as a serious matter. Moreover, the dropout rate amongst the Orang Asli children, still remain a great cause for concern. One of the main reasons for the problem is the students' poor academic achievement (Sharifah Md Nor et al., 2011). Other factors that also been described by researchers as create educational problems for the Orang Asli students is instructional or pedagogical factors. According to Razaq Ahmad et al. (2011), they found that the students do not like fierce and strict teachers and they feel demotivated with the old

stereotype of teaching techniques. This factor have been proved by the seven of Orang Asli students from SK Tahoi, Gua Musang, Kelantan who ran away from school hostel due to feared punishment after allegation of some pupils bathing in river without permission on August 2015 as reported by The Star. Five of them found dead tragically. Since from that incident, most of the parents of Orang Asli students afraid of sending their children to school (Fatimah Zainal, 2018). These factors may effect to academic engagement among Orang Asli students.

### **Teacher's Perspective on Students Academic Engagement**

According to Sharipah 2010, teachers play a vital role and contribution in increasing the level of confidence and motivation to students which will affect their academic performance. A teacher's role can be translated into different contexts. The role played by teachers will able to form actively participations from students and a sense of security among students in a classroom. Therefore, teachers need to be responsive to the importance of giving a sense of confidence and high self-efficacy among their students. Interesting teaching procedure will increase the students' confidence (Syed Sahil & Awang Hashim, 2011). In this case, teachers need to motivate structure and evaluate the students' learning process. Hence, by giving student's motivation and structuring learning properly both can encourage students to make progress and create a positive interdependence among other students in the class. On the other hand, students need to know the feedback and respond from the teachers regarding their performance in learning process so that they may improve their engagement in academic.

In addition, teachers also need to have a high level of understanding about the content of their teaching, being able to apply learning that suits both the content and depth of standards with the curriculum objectives; have effective communication strategies to facilitate students' learning, able to use a variety of assessments, expert in analyzing effective evaluation methods, can provide meaningful feedback on students' works, have the ability to develop a marking scheme for measuring students' performance, able to convey the assessment information to students in order to motivate them to learn; and able to understand the issues of law and ethics related to assessment practices in the classroom (Alkharusi, et. al., 2014).

The problem of low student engagement can lead to numerous negative outcomes (Harris, 2011). The National Research Council and Institute of Medicine (2004) reports "majority of students agreed that dropping out of school is the last step in a long process through which students becomes disengaged from school". A low student engagement leads to 25% of students' sense of low belonging, and 20% regularly absent from school (Willms, 2009). Student engagement is one factor that contributes to higher student achievement, particularly within subgroups (Lee & Shute, 2009; Antaramian et al., 2010; Kuh, 2001). Antaramian et al. stated, "Students who are more engaged in school tend to have higher grades and better performance on standardized tests" (2010). Corso et al. (2013) state that, "the degree to which students think, feel, and act engaged in school plays a vital role in their chances for academic and life success, yet levels of student engagement remain low." Their research examines how engagement works within a framework of interactions between students, teachers, and the class content. Corso et al. (2013) propose a model that can be understood in terms of relationship, teacher's knowledge of content and pedagogy, and relevance to student. A limitation to this model is that it has not been tested nor does it take into consideration factors outside of the classroom in relation to student engagement, such as extracurricular activities. Forneris, Camiré, and Williamson examined the self-reported effects of 32 involvement in extracurriculars and student engagement concluding, "Youth involved in both sport and non-sport extracurricular activities scored higher on perceived school engagement than youth who are not involved in any extracurricular activities (2015).

Therefore, school leaders, especially principals should cooperate with teachers to create and reform the school environment that can foster students' interest in learning and improve their academic performance better. Teachers need to maximize the time on the tasks and the opportunity to learn, remove the barriers to students' achievement, and providing tools and support to students in need. Teachers need to give additional practice to meet the demands and needs of all students. For schools that are located in the cities especially, where teaching and learning are often pressured by various other challenges, it is important for school leaders to put a time limit to provide space for teaching and learning process to be the maximum as possible. Teachers need to be given guidance, specifically in building a serious learning community to create a generation of students who cooperate in meeting the

high expectations of academic success (Kirby & DiPaola, 2010; Slavin, 2001). For schools that adopt effective collective efficacy, teachers those schools will continuously monitor students with learning disabilities.

### Research Methodology

This research has been conducted in two different schools which refer to Sekolah Kebangsaan Lemoi (Orang Asli Students) and Sekolah Kebangsaan Tun Razak. This study is a non-experimental research so called descriptive research. This research is designed to look on perspective of teachers on academic engagement among students especially Orang Asli students. The required data for this study were collected by using survey instruments which consist of a set of structured question taken from *Modified Students Participations Questionnaire* (mSPQ) (Manisah & Noorfaziha, 2014). This instrument is to look on teacher's perspective among student's academic engagement in school. In addition, the questionnaire is divided into three parts, Part A on demographic background, Part B focus on Students Engagement and finally Part C emphasis on Teacher's Perspective. The data derived were analyzed by using SPSS Version 21.

Table 4.1 illustrates the profile of respondents for this study and it has been divided into four categories namely gender, job tenure, age, and academic qualification. It shows that most of the respondents were females with 16 (53.3%) respondents. It also found that 7 (23.3%) of the respondents have been working for more than 20 years. The range of the majority respondents were between 41 – 50 years old and 27 (90%) of them are holding Bachelor's Degree.

Demographic Profile of Respondents ( $n=30$ )

Table 1 Respondent's Profile Variables	Label	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	14	46.7
	Female	16	53.3
Job Tenure	Less than 3 years	5	16.7
	3 – 5 years	5	16.7
	6 – 10 years	5	16.7
	11 – 15 years	4	13.3
	16 – 20 years	4	13.3
	More than 20 years	7	23.3
Age	20 – 30 years old	8	26.7
	31 – 40 years old	9	30.0
	41 – 50 years old	11	36.7
	More than 50 years old	2	6.70

Academic Qualification	Bachelor's Degree	27	90.0
	Master's Degree	3	10.0

## Findings and Discussion

The following section discussed the findings for this study. The descriptive statistics were used to gauge the mean and standard deviation from the respondents. To interpret the means obtained from the analysis, Table 2 below is referred to

Table 2 Interpretation for Mean Score

Mean	Interpretation
1.00 – 1.79	Very Low
1.80 – 2.59	Low
2.60 – 3.39	Median
3.40 – 4.19	High
4.20 – 5.00	Very High

Source: Yek Siew King, Jurnal Penyelidikan Pendidikan (2017)

Table 3 Level of Student's Engagement based on Teacher's perspectives

Bil.	Item	SK Lemoi		SK Kg. Tun Razak	
		Analysis	Mean (SD)	Analysis	Mean (SD)
1.	Student willing to give full commitment with their members in class.	Very High	4.20 (.676)	High	3.73 (.704)
2.	Student always focuses in class.	Median	3.27 (.704)	Median	3.20 (.676)
3.	Students choose to solve the easier task compare the difficult one.	Very High	4.20 (.676)	High	4.13 (.640)
4.	Student knows that school is important.	Median	3.27 (.799)	Median	3.20 (.676)

5.	Student put his/her effort in completing the task.	High	3.47 (.834)	High	3.40 (.632)
6.	There are students who do not want to involve in any activities or task in class.	Median	2.93 (1.100)	Median	2.87 (.915)
7.	Student always completed the task in class.	Median	3.33 (.976)	Median	2.73 (.704)
8.	Student show interest in participating activities in school such as Sport Day or Carnival Event.	High	4.13 (.743)	Median	3.27 (.704)
9.	Student will raise his/her hand to answer question.	High	3.47 (.743)	Median	3.33 (.724)
10.	Student actively involved in discussion in a group.	Median	3.07 (.594)	Median	3.27 (.594)
11.	Student is very independent in using all the tools and equipments provided in school.	Median	2.67(.617)	Median	2.93 (.617)
12.	Student completed his/her homework on time.	Median	2.80 (.676)	Median	2.87 (.640)
13.	Student try to complete his/her work in detail not flippantly	Median	2.67 (.724)	Median	2.93 (.594)
14.	Student very strong and confident in facing any problem or difficulty.	Median	3.27 (.458)	Median	3.00 (.535)
15.	Student always late to class.	Low	2.13 (1.246)	Median	3.07 (1.100)
16.	Student will ask help from teacher/classmate will a polite way.	High	3.67 (.617)	High	3.53 (.516)
17.	Students always distract his/her other classmate.	Low	2.13 (.990)	Median	2.80 (1.146)
18.	Students know how to interact with other members in class.	High	3.40 (.828)	High	3.40 (.828)
19.	Student always ask question to get information.	Median	3.20 (.775)	Median	3.33 (.617)
20.	Student does not know anything in class.	Low	2.47 (.915)	Median	2.67 (1.047)

21.	Students try to complete the task even though it is difficult.	Median	2.87 (.915)	Median	3.07 (.458)
22.	Students do know show any interest or independent in completing the task given.	High	3.40 (.910)	High	3.60 (.910)
23.	Student always looking up to those who are excellent in class.	High	3.53 (.834)	High	3.60 (.737)
Total		Median	3.19 (.222)	Median	3.21 (.252)

Based on Table 3, the level of student engagement based on Teacher's perspectives for both school SK Lemoi and SK Kg. Tun Razak were at median level with mean 3.19 (.222) and 3.21 (.252) respectively. It showed that there is no huge gap on teacher's perspectives for pupils at both schools, regardless of their demographic background.

In details, the finding explained Orang Asli students are showed very high level of commitment towards their friends (M=4.20, SD =.676) rather than non-Orang Asli (M=4.20, SD=.704). This item displayed the major comparison between these two groups of students. Apart from that, item 3 also showed high level of differences between students at these school which refer to level of mean 4.20 (.676) and 4.13 (.640). The respondents also asked to rate the student engagement on outdoor activities such as Sport Day or Carnival Event. There is huge gap where Orang Asli student are more attracted to outdoor activities (M= 4.13, SD = .743) compared to non-Orang Asli Student (M=3.27, SD=.704).

Due to the geographical barriers, table 3 indicated, those non-Orang Asli students are facing a problem to be punctual to school compared to non-Orang Asli with level of median mean for non-Orang Asli (M=3.07, SD=1.10) and low level for Orang Asli students (M=3.13, SD=1.246). In terms of student interest in learning between both groups of students, Orang Asli students possessed lower level of focus in class (M=2.13, SD=.990), whereby they tend to divert their friends' attention to something else unlike non-Orang Asli students (M=2.80, SD=1.146). Based on table 3, the item that showed major differences on both groups of students are item 20, where the level of student knowledge

Overall, the level of students' academic engagement in SK Lemoi and SK Kg Tun Razak were slightly difference in term of level of mean, 3.19 (SD=.834) and 3.21 (SD=.252) respectively both group students were at median level of engagement.

**Table 4** Level of Teacher's Perspective on Student's Academic Engagement

Bil.	Item	SK Lemoi		SK Kg. Tun Razak	
		Analysis	Mean (SD)	Analysis	Mean (SD)
1.	Student is very talkative in class.	High	3.47 (1.246)	High	3.87 (.834)
2.	Students always acting weird and difficult to pay attention in class.	Median	2.87 (1.187)	Median	3.33 (.900)
3.	Students always show their needs in the correct way.	Median	3.33 (.816)	Median	3.13 (.834)
4.	Student is easy to give up in completing his/her task.	Median	3.33 (.724)	High	3.60 (.828)

5.	Student always refer to teacher during discussion in school.	Median	2.67 (.488)	Median	3.00 (.655)
6.	Students know the important of the content of the syllabus.	Low	2.47 (.990)	Median	3.13 (.834)
7.	Student always forget and feel lost and empty during study.	High	3.73 (1.163)	Median	3.13 (1.125)
8.	Students always need to be warned.	Very High	4.33 (.816)	Very High	4.33 (.724)
9.	Student is very independent in searching information during study.	Low	2.20 (.941)	Median	2.67 (.724)
10.	Communications seem good within this organization.	Low	2.40 (.828)	Median	2.73 (.704)
11.	Students always do his/her task well than as expected.	Low	2.47 (.640)	Median	3.07 (.884)
12.	Students know how to refer dictionary, encyclopedia or any sources in order to received data.	Median	2.80 (1.082)	Median	3.33 (.617)
Total		Median	3.00 (.441)	Median	3.27 (.322)

Table 4 indicated the level of teachers' perspectives on students' academic engagement for SK Lemoi and SK Kg. Tun Razak. Overall, there are no huge gaps perspectives between teachers at both schools. The researcher would like to emphasize on item 4, 6, 7 and 11 in details.

Based on item 4, it found that teachers in SK Lemoi ( $M=3.33$ ,  $SD=.724$ ) agreed that their students are easily give with the task given compared to students in SK Kg. Tun Razak, which the students are at median level ( $M=3.60$ ,  $SD=.828$ ). It is also found that Orang Asli students has a low level of subjects awareness ( $M=2.47$ ,  $SD=.990$ ), whereby they did not know the reason why the need to learn the subjects but non-Orang Asli students are has median level of awareness ( $M=3.13$ ,  $SD=.834$ ). Findings for item 7 is consistent with the finding for item 17, which the students tend to easily divert to others thing that will lead to lose focus during study. The level of teachers' perspectives on this item for Orang Asli students is high ( $M=3.73$ ,  $SD=1.163$ ), meanwhile median level for non-orang Asli student ( $M=3.13$   $SD$ , 1.125). When handing out a task to the students, expectation is high for the students to complete it. However, item 11 showed that the teacher in SK Lemoi are expecting low from their students ( $M=2.47$ ,  $SD=0.640$ ) compared to teachers in SK Kg. Tun Razak that has a median level of expectation towards their students ( $M=3.07$ ,  $SD=.884$ ).

To this extent, it found that level of teachers' perspectives for Orang Asli student and non-Orang Asli students were in median level. For SK Lemoi, the mean was 3.00 ( $SD=.441$ ) and mean for SK Kg Tun Razak were 3.27 ( $SD=.322$ ).

## Conclusion

Based on the findings, it was found that there is no major different on teachers' perspectives towards students' engagement for both Orang Asli and non-Orang Asli. Table 2 showed that the students' engagement evaluated by their teachers. The differences can be seen on the selected items that show Orang Asli students highly engaged on certain aspects compared to non-Orang Asli students. In the

nutshell, this study discovered that regardless of the students' background, they are engaging with academic activities carried out by the teachers. The study also examined the teachers' perspectives on students' engagement for Orang Asli and non-Orang Asli students and it showed that the teachers for both schools are perceived median level for overall engagement toward their students. This is proved that Minister of Education are providing and equipped teachers with required skills and abilities to conduct the class regardless the location of the school to make sure that students are equally educated within the same systems and policies.

In the 9<sup>th</sup> Malaysia Plan, government has allocated more than RM170M to JHEOA to conduct varieties of program for Orang Asli community which is focusing on upgrading the quality of life through educational program (EPU, 2016). Finding from this study is expected to provide insight perspectives on the factors that distinguish students' performance, according to their demographic and geographic differences. It is useful for the educator and policy regulator to look on these aspects in ensuring the initiatives plan by the authority is meeting their objectives, especially program that associated with Orang Asli community. Future study is recommended to be conducted with a larger population and focusing on secondary and also higher institution students from other different background as well.

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