

ASSIMILATION EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM FOR ROHINGYA CHILDREN FOR THEIR SURVIVAL AND DEVELOPMENT

* Shima Shazana Mohd Ali¹, Yarina Ahmad^{1,2}, Nor Suziwana Tahir¹ and Nor Azira Ayob¹

¹Faculty of Administrative Science and Policy Studies

²Institute of Biodiversity and Sustainable Development

*Corresponding author's email: shima.uitm@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This paper presents an assimilation educational program for Rohingya children for their survival and development in Malaysia. Children deserve protection from authority as they are vulnerable to various issues and circumstances. The right to education, which is the central mechanism of human capital, is one of the most essential aspects in shaping children's behaviour and personality. Education provides knowledge that may prevent the involvement of children in crimes. Hence, education for every child must be prioritised regardless of their status. This product aims to help Rohingya children to assimilate with Malaysian culture and identity that will indirectly help their survival and development in this country. This initiative will employ four strategies, which are the interactive book, selected videos, and stories related to Malaysia, and to be conducted within a week through a quasi-experiment technique. In terms of contribution and novelty, this product can be considered novel because the product (1) serves the international agenda, particularly the Child Rights Convention (CRC) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), (2) utilises "education" as a bridging mechanism to enhance assimilation among Rohingya children in Malaysia, and is (3) comprehensive as it employs proactive strategies in producing the product.

Keywords: education, assimilation, Rohingya children

1. INTRODUCTION

The issue of Rohingya refugees has been debated globally since the 1970s, as the Myanmar government continues to persecute the Rohingya. The Rohingyas have fled Myanmar and seek refuge in various countries, including neighbouring Bangladesh, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, and others (Ullah, 2016). This topic has also been discussed among ASEAN nations. However, in the framework of the ASEAN policy of non-interference in state members' internal affairs, it is always difficult for members to address further with the Myanmar government on the concerns of the Rohingyas. Furthermore, the Rohingya problem has received worldwide attention. Indeed, the international organisation has compelled the Myanmar government for the human rights of the Rohingya; yet, a solution to this complicated issue remains elusive.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) recognises the right of every child to education, regardless of their background or position (refugees, undocumented, stateless, and others). As all children should be able to study and grow, the CRC international standards identify education as a basic right, allowing refugee children to attain education. However, this right has been debated since the 2000s as Malaysia is a non-signatory of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees but is a signatory of the CRC. There are five (5) provisions under reservation on CRC including the right of immigrants to free basic education. As a result, Rohingya children (along with other refugee children) are denied educational opportunities, thus, the inability to integrate into Malaysian society and indirectly influence their development in the future.

Recognising the value of education, most Rohingya parents ensure that their children should have the opportunity in acquiring education (Tenaganita, 2008) and parallel to the need of having food and freedom (Lee, 2013). The need to assimilate with the locals of the host country through education has been highlighted since Americanization among European immigrants. As the immigrants learned and used English, they could assimilate and integrate into the local society (Strouse, 1987). This indicates the role of education that assists the immigrants to adapt to the new place, society, and environment.

The assimilation of the Rohingya in Malaysia is a survival strategy to integrate into local society even though that results in another 'genocide' of their culture and identity (O'Brien & Hoffstaedter, 2020). Even they have to sacrifice their identity; the immigrants insist on assimilating as that continuously assists their survival and development in the transit countries like Malaysia (Wake & Cheung, 2016). This situation also happened among Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh who adapted the language and acquired education as part of their survival strategy (Ahmed et al., 2020). This situation shows the importance of education that acts as a tool in the assimilation process for their survival.

In Malaysia, Rohingya children are having difficulties in getting quality education due to several factors which are: (1) restriction to enter public schools, (2) disagreement to enter school by Rohingya parents, and (3) underqualified teachers in learning centers. Thus, it is necessary to comprehend the opportunities and accessibility of Rohingya children into public schools and the reasons to create awareness among Rohingya parents who are hesitant to send their children to the local schools. This is because the Rohingya in Malaysia are trapped for a long period in waiting for relocation to third countries or even to return to their original homeland, Myanmar. The COVID-19 pandemic has worsened the condition and increased challenges and hurdles for their repatriation. Most countries strengthened their border security to contain the transmission of the COVID-19 virus which indirectly will protect children. Besides, the principle of Jus Soli or birth right citizenship prevents the refugees from getting citizenship even when they are born in Malaysia (Letchamanan, 2013; Azlinariah et al., 2018; Palik, 2020). As a result, the Rohingya children have to undertake other actions to survive in this transit country, and one of them is through attaining education for helping the assimilation process.

This paper presents an initiative called "Assimilation Educational Program for Rohingya Children for their Survival and Development", designed for the data collection of doctoral research that aims to study how education can be the bridging mechanism to enhance assimilation among Rohingya children for their survival and development.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The initiative of "Assimilation Educational Program for Rohingya Children for their Survival and Development" employs four (4) strategies:

1. Interactive book (printed and digital version) which comprises important information about Malaysia, which are culture (ethnicities – Malay, Chinese, Indian and others), and identity (Malaysian flag, traditional clothes, food, and others.)
2. Selected videos and stories related to Malaysia will be shared during the educational program as supporting information to enhance the assimilation of the Rohingya children.
3. The "Assimilation Educational Program for Rohingya Children for their Survival and Development" will be conducted within a week with the cooperation of the alternative learning centres and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).
4. Pre- and post-quasi-experiment will be conducted among Rohingya children at selected learning centres in Klang Valley. The application of the quasi-experiment technique is best suited to this study, which is based on a natural state and the effects or outcome will be measured through pre- and post-data collection (Salkind, 2012).













3. CONTRIBUTION AND USEFULNESS/COMMERCIALISATION

About the Product

The "Assimilation Educational Program for Rohingya Children for their Survival and Development" is designed in dual language (English and *Malay* languages). The decision to use these two languages is due to:

1. *The Malay* language is the national language of Malaysia, and Rohingya children need to be familiarised with the *Malay* language as part of their assimilation process.
2. The English language is the official international language used by many countries. This is important for Rohingya children to survive if they were placed in any third country that used English as their national language (E.g., Australia, Canada, and others).
3. However, during the implementation of this program, a translator who is an expert in English, the Malay language, and the Rohingya languages will assist in communicating with Rohingya children at the alternative learning centres.

The "Assimilation Educational Program for Rohingya Children for their Survival and Development" covers culture (ethnicities – Malay, Chinese, Indian, and others) and identity (Malaysian flag, traditional clothes, food, and national flower). (Refer Figure 1).

<p>Activity 1: Match the pictures</p> <p>Match the pictures below with the correct answer <i>Padankan gambar di bawah</i></p> <div style="display: flex; flex-direction: column; align-items: center;"> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center; margin-bottom: 10px;">  <div style="margin: 0 10px;">■</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; background-color: #d4edda;">Cheongsam</div> </div> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center; margin-bottom: 10px;">  <div style="margin: 0 10px;">■</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; background-color: #d1ecf1;">Baju Melayu</div> </div> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center; margin-bottom: 10px;">  <div style="margin: 0 10px;">■</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; background-color: #fff3cd;">Sari</div> </div> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center;">  <div style="margin: 0 10px;">■</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; background-color: #d6d8db;">Baju Kurung</div> </div> </div>	<p>Activity 2: Tick the right answer</p> <p>Which one is Malaysia's Flag? Tick the right answer <i>Tandakan bendera Malaysia</i></p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; margin-bottom: 20px;"> <div style="text-align: center;"> <input type="checkbox"/>  </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <input type="checkbox"/>  </div> </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> <div style="text-align: center;"> <input type="checkbox"/>  </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <input type="checkbox"/>  </div> </div> <p style="text-align: center; margin-top: 20px;">In which state do you live? Tick your answer <i>Tandakan bendera negeri tempat tinggal anda</i></p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; margin-bottom: 20px;"> <div style="text-align: center;"> <input type="checkbox"/>  <p>Selangor</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <input type="checkbox"/>  <p>Perak</p> </div> </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> <div style="text-align: center;"> <input type="checkbox"/>  <p>Pulau Pinang</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <input type="checkbox"/>  <p>Kuala Lumpur</p> </div> </div>
Activity 3: Match and Circle	Activity 4: Colouring

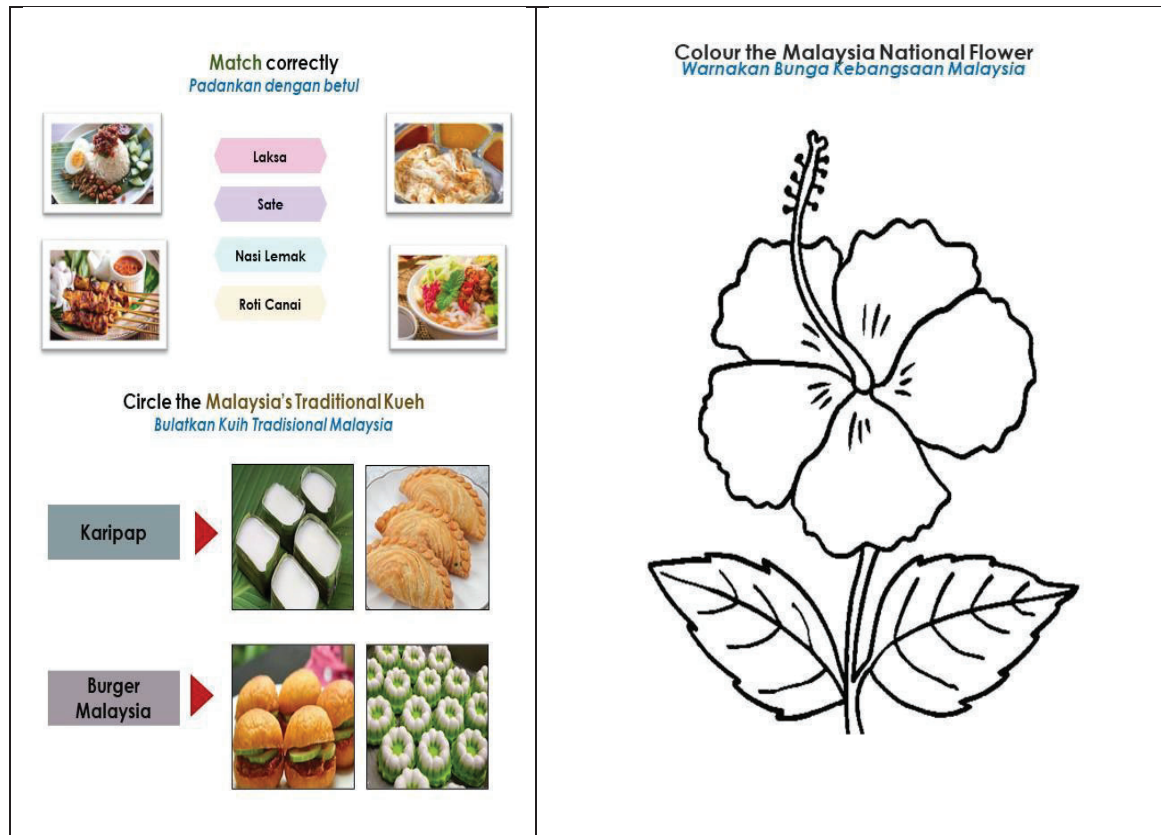


Figure 1: Assimilation Educational Activities

4. UNIQUENESS AND NOVELTY

There are four (4) uniqueness and novelty of this initiative:

1. This initiative is considered novel as it serves the international agenda, particularly the Child Rights Convention (CRC) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Although Malaysia is a non-signatory of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees; Malaysia is the state party of the CRC. Based on the CRC, Malaysia needs to provide free education at the primary level for all children regardless of their status. However, the Malaysian government currently reserved this clause and only allowed the establishment of alternative learning centers for refugee children.
2. This initiative employed "education" as a bridging mechanism to enhance assimilation among Rohingya children in Malaysia. Education is a powerful tool that serves as the "means" to achieve the "end". In the context of this study, the main aim (end) is to help Rohingya children to assimilate with Malaysian culture and identity—this will help their survival and development. This is supported by Richard Mayo-Smith (1894) in Kivisto and Faist (2010), who mentioned two primary factors contributing to assimilation, which are education and citizenship rights. Meanwhile, Kalmijn and Kraaykamp (2018) mentioned that the socioeconomic success of second-generation migrants is mostly due to education.
3. This initiative is considered comprehensive as it utilised four strategies, which are the interactive book (printed and digital version), selected videos, and stories related to Malaysia, designed to be conducted within a week through a quasi-experiment technique.
4. This initiative is originally developed based on doctoral research undertaken by the main author of this paper. Hence, this is considered as the novelty of this product. Once this initiative is implemented, the product (interactive book and the implementation of this program) will be improved continuously. Further, this initiative can be replicated by other parties to enhance assimilation among Refugee children.

5. POTENTIAL FOR COMMERCIALISATION

This initiative will be improved based on the implementation among Rohingya children at the alternative learning centres (proposed data collection will be in January 2022). The revised version of this initiative will be proposed for a complete "Module of Assimilation among Rohingya children". Following this idea, this initiative will have the potential to be commercialised to alternative learning centres in Malaysia and be promoted to other neighbouring countries. This initiative is not aimed at creating high profit; however, it will serve as part of the responsibility of Malaysia to ensure the survival and development of Rohingya children.

6. CONCLUSION

"All children are our children", thus, children regardless of their status require care and protection as they are vulnerable to the surrounding. The "Assimilation Educational Program for Rohingya Children for their Survival and Development" will serve as a novel initiative to help the country fulfil its responsibility in line with CRC and SDGs.

7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Appreciation to the coordinator and participants of FSPPP- Graduate Researchers in Print for their comments and ideas on the improvement of this paper as well as to FSPPP for support and encouragement.

REFERENCES

- Ahmed, M., Nawal, S. N., Lhamo, U. S., & Bui, N. T. (2020). The Assimilation of Stateless Rohingyas in Bangladesh. In *Citizenship, Nationalism and Refugeehood of Rohingyas in Southern Asia* (pp. 137–154). Springer Singapore. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-2168-3>
- Azlinariah, A., Dali, A. M., & Mohamad Rodzi, A. R. (2018). *Surviving Stateless Refugees: The Uncertain Future of Rohingya's Children in Malaysia*. 45(July), 177–195.
- Kalmijn, M., & Kraaykamp, G. (2018). Determinants of cultural assimilation in the second generation. A longitudinal analysis of values about marriage and sexuality among Moroccan and Turkish migrants. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 44(5), 697–717. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2017.1363644>
- Kivisto, P., & Faist, T. (2010). Beyond a border: The causes and consequences of contemporary immigration. In *Beyond a Border: The Causes and Consequences of Contemporary Immigration*. Sage Publication. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483349404>
- Lee, S. E. (2013). Education as a Human Right in the 21st Century. *Education as a Human Right in the 21st Century*, 21(1), 1.
- Letchamanan, H. (2013). *Myanmar's Rohingya Refugees in Malaysia: Education and the Way Forward*. 2(2), 86–97.
- O'Brien, M., & Hoffstaedter, G. (2020). "There We Are Nothing, Here We Are Nothing!"—The Enduring Effects of the Rohingya Genocide. *Social Sciences*, 9(11), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci9110209>
- Palik, J. (2020). Education for Rohingya Refugee Children in Malaysia. *Prio Policy Brief*, 02. www.prio.org
- Salkind, N. J. (2012). *Exploring Research*. Pearson Education Inc. New Jersey: University of Kansas.
- Strouse, J. (1987). Continuing themes in assimilation through education. *Equity and Excellence in Education*, 23(1–2), 105–113. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1066568870230114>
- Tenaganita. (2008). *The Revolving Door: Modern Day Slavery Refugees*. Kuala Lumpur: Tenaganita
- Ullah, A. K. M. A. (2016). *Rohingya Crisis in Myanmar: Seeking Justice for the "Stateless ."* <https://doi.org/10.1177/1043986216660811>
- Wake, C., & Cheung, T. (2016). *Livelihood strategies of Rohingya refugees in Malaysia 'We want to live in dignity'* (Issue June).