

**THE EFFECTS OF GENRE APPROACH ON
ORANG ASLI'S EFL DESCRIPTIVE WRITING:
A CASE STUDY OF A SECONDARY SCHOOL
IN PAHANG**

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by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	iii
LIST OF TABLES	vii
LIST OF FIGURES	ix
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	x
LIST OF APPENDICES	xi
ABSTRAK	xii
ABSTRACT	xiv
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Background of the Study.....	5
1.2.1 Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025	6
1.2.2 English Language Education Roadmap for Malaysia.....	7
1.2.3 The Standards-Based English Language Curriculum	7
1.2.4 Orang Asli Students' EFL Writing Skills	8
1.3 Statement of the Problem	10
1.4 Research Objectives	14
1.5 Research Questions	14
1.6 Significance of the Study	14
1.7 Limitations of the Study	15
1.8 Definition of Terms	16
1.9 Conclusion.....	18
CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW	20
2.1 Introduction	20
2.2 The Orang Asli in Malaysia	20

2.2.1	Education Profile of Orang Asli Students.....	21
2.2.2	Educative Measures by the Government	24
2.2.3	Low English Language Proficiency of EFL Orang Asli Students	27
2.3	Teaching EFL Writing	28
2.3.1	The Product Approach	29
2.3.2	The Process Approach	30
2.3.3	The Genre Approach.....	32
2.4	Current Pedagogical Issues on EFL Writing in Malaysia.....	35
2.4.1	Varied Teaching Practices Among Teachers.....	35
2.4.2	Impracticality of Conventional Writing Approaches for Students	36
2.4.3	Students' Challenges in EFL Writing.....	38
2.5	Related Studies to Genre Approach	39
2.5.1	Genre Approach in the Global Context.....	39
2.5.2	Genre Approach in the Malaysian Context.....	45
2.6	Conceptual Framework of the Study.....	49
2.6.1	The Notion of Genre	54
2.6.2	Systemic Functional Linguistics	55
2.6.3	Teaching and Learning Cycle for Genre Writing	57
2.6.4	Theory of Sociocultural Learning.....	58
2.7	Conclusion.....	59
CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY.....		61
3.1	Introduction	61
3.2	Research Design.....	61
3.2.1	Mixed Methods Case Study Design.....	62
3.2.2	Quasi-Experiment	63
3.3	Research Site.....	66
3.4	Participant Selection.....	67

3.5	Research Instruments	68
3.5.1	Pretest and Posttest.....	68
3.5.2	Rubric for Writing Assessment.....	69
3.5.3	Teaching Materials for the Intervention.....	70
3.5.3(a)	Scheme of Work	71
3.5.3(b)	Lesson Plans.....	73
3.5.4	Questionnaire	77
3.5.5	Focus Group Discussion	78
3.6	Pilot Study.....	79
3.7	Validity and Reliability of the Instruments	81
3.7.1	Pretest and Posttest.....	81
3.7.1(a)	The Scoring Procedure	82
3.7.1(b)	Interrater Reliability of the Scores	83
3.7.2	Teaching Materials for the Intervention.....	83
3.7.3	Questionnaire	83
3.7.4	Focus Group Discussion	84
3.8	Research Procedure	84
3.9	Data Analysis	88
3.9.1	Analysis of Pretest and Posttest	88
3.9.2	Analysis of Questionnaire.....	89
3.9.3	Analysis of Focus Group Discussion.....	89
3.9.4	Triangulation Protocol	90
3.10	Ethical Considerations.....	90
3.11	Conclusion.....	91
	CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS	92
4.1	Introduction	92
4.2	Findings and Analysis in Relation to RQ 1	92

4.2.1	Interrater Reliability of the Raters	93
4.2.2	Pretest and Posttest Scores of Both Groups	94
4.2.3	Analysis of Pretest-Posttest Scores Within Groups	96
4.2.4	Analysis of Pretest-Posttest Scores Between Groups	100
4.2.5	Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA)	104
4.2.6	Summary of Findings Related to RQ 1	107
4.3	Findings and Analysis in Relation to RQ 2	108
4.3.1	Reliability of the Questionnaire	109
4.3.2	Demographic Information	110
4.3.3	Students' Perceptions towards the Field and Context	114
4.3.4	Students' Perceptions towards Deconstruction	116
4.3.5	Students' Perceptions towards Joint Construction	120
4.3.6	Students' Perceptions towards Independent Construction	122
4.3.7	Students' Perceptions towards the Descriptive Genre	126
4.3.8	Summary of Findings Related to RQ 2	129
4.4	Conclusion	129
CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION		131
5.1	Introduction	131
5.2	Discussion on the Effectiveness of the Genre Approach in Improving Students' Descriptive Writing	131
5.3	Discussion on Students' Perceptions in using the Genre Approach as a Framework to Overcome Challenges in Learning Descriptive Writing	134
5.4	Pedagogical Implications	138
5.5	Recommendations for Future Research	141
5.6	Conclusion	142
REFERENCES		143

APPENDICES

LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 3.1	Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria 68
Table 3.2	Scheme of Work..... 72
Table 3.3	Sample of Genre Approach Lesson Plans 74
Table 3.4	Sample of Process Approach Lesson Plans 75
Table 3.5	Sample of Model Texts 76
Table 3.6	Sample of Planning Sheets..... 77
Table 4.1	Cohen’s Weighted Kappa 93
Table 4.2	Pearson Correlation..... 93
Table 4.3	Mean Pretest Scores of the Experimental Group 94
Table 4.4	Mean Posttest Scores of the Experimental Group..... 95
Table 4.5	Mean Pretest Scores of the Control Group 95
Table 4.6	Mean Posttest Scores of the Control Group..... 96
Table 4.7	Paired Samples T-Test of Experimental Group Mean Scores 97
Table 4.8	Paired Samples T-Test of Control Group Mean Scores..... 98
Table 4.9	Levene’s Test for Equality of Variances..... 100
Table 4.10	Independent Samples T-Test of Pretest Scores Between Groups 101
Table 4.11	Independent Samples T-Test of Posttest Scores Between Groups... 102
Table 4.12	The Shapiro-Wilk Test for Normality..... 104
Table 4.13	Levene’s Test of Equality of Error Variances..... 104
Table 4.14	Comparison of Adjusted Posttest Scores Between Groups 105
Table 4.15	Tests of Between-Subjects Effects..... 106
Table 4.16	Internal Consistency of the Questionnaire 109
Table 4.17	Gender 110

Table 4.18	PT3 English Grade	111
Table 4.19	Years Spent Learning English.....	112
Table 4.20	Frequency of English Use	113
Table 4.21	Students' Perceptions towards the Field and Context.....	114
Table 4.22	Students' Perceptions towards Deconstruction	117
Table 4.23	Students' Perceptions towards Joint Construction.....	120
Table 4.24	Students' Perceptions towards Independent Construction.....	123
Table 4.25	Students' Perceptions towards the Descriptive Genre	126

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 2.1	Conceptual Framework of the Study 50
Figure 2.2	Strata and Metafunctions in SFL 56
Figure 2.3	Teaching and Learning Cycle for Genre Writing 57
Figure 3.1	B1 Assessment Scale 70
Figure 3.2	Research Procedure 87
Figure 4.1	Comparison of Experimental Group Mean Scores 97
Figure 4.2	Comparison of Control Group Mean Scores 99
Figure 4.3	Comparison of Pretest Scores Between Groups 101
Figure 4.4	Comparison of Posttest Scores Between Groups 103
Figure 4.5	Comparison of Adjusted Posttest Scores Between Groups 106
Figure 4.6	Gender 110
Figure 4.7	PT3 English Grade 111
Figure 4.8	Years Spent Learning English 112
Figure 4.9	Frequency of English Use 113
Figure 4.10	Students' Perceptions towards the Field and Context 115
Figure 4.11	Students' Perceptions towards Deconstruction 117
Figure 4.12	Students' Perceptions towards Joint Construction 121
Figure 4.13	Students' Perceptions towards Independent Construction 123
Figure 4.14	Students' Perceptions towards the Descriptive Genre 127
Figure 5.1	The Genre Approach Lesson Model 139

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BPSH	School Management Division
CEFR	Common European Framework of Reference for Languages
EFL	English as a foreign language
ELT	English language teaching
ESL	English as a second language
JAKOA	Department of Orang Asli Development
JPN	State Education Department
KPLB	Malaysian Ministry of Rural Development
KPM	Ministry of Education Malaysia
KSSM	Secondary School Standards-Based Curriculum
KSSR	Primary School Standards-Based Curriculum
L1	First language
L2	Second language
LINUS	Literacy and Numeracy Screening Programme
MEB	Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025
PT3	Form Three Assessment
SBELC	Standards-Based English Language Curriculum
SFL	Systemic Functional Linguistics
SPM	Malaysian Certificate of Examination
SUHAKAM	Human Rights Commission of Malaysia
UCLES	University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate
UPSR	Primary School Evaluation Test

LIST OF APPENDICES

- Appendix A Pretest and Posttest
- Appendix B Genre Approach Lesson Plans
- Appendix C Process Approach Lesson Plans
- Appendix D Model Texts for the Genre Approach
- Appendix E Planning Sheets for the Genre Approach
- Appendix F Questionnaire
- Appendix G Translated Questionnaire
- Appendix H Focus Group Discussion Questions
- Appendix I Translated Focus Group Discussion Questions
- Appendix J eRAS 2.0 Letter of Permission
- Appendix K JPN Pahang Letter of Permission
- Appendix L Informed Consent Form
- Appendix M Samples of Students' Essays
- Appendix N Pretest and Posttest Scores
- Appendix O Sample Transcription of Focus Group Discussion

**KESAN-KESAN PENDEKATAN GENRE TERHADAP PENULISAN
DESKRIPTIF EFL (BAHASA INGGERIS SEBAGAI BAHASA ASING)
ORANG ASLI: KAJIAN KES DI SEBUAH SEKOLAH MENENGAH DI
PAHANG**

ABSTRAK

Orang Asli di Malaysia yang tidak bertutur atau menggunakan bahasa Inggeris dalam kehidupan seharian mereka mengakibatkan mereka mempunyai penguasaan bahasa Inggeris yang rendah serta kemahiran menulis yang lemah. Kefasihan EFL (Bahasa Inggeris sebagai Bahasa Asing) mereka yang sedia ada ditambah dengan masalah yang berterusan dalam penerimaan pendidikan baik lalu membantutkan lagi perkembangan bahasa Inggeris mereka. Selaras dengan matlamat jangka panjang yang ditetapkan oleh Pelan Pembangunan Pendidikan Malaysia 2015-2025 (MEB) dan matlamat pembangunan lestari keempat untuk memberikan pendidikan yang berkualiti, inklusif dan adil terhadap masyarakat peribumi, kajian ini mengkaji keberkesanan pendekatan genre dalam meningkatkan tahap penulisan deskriptif pelajar Orang Asli EFL menengah, dan menganalisis persepsi mereka dalam menggunakan pendekatan genre sebagai kerangka untuk mengatasi cabaran dalam pembelajaran penulisan deskriptif. Kerangka konseptual ini merangkumi Kefungsian Linguistik Sistemik (SFL), kitaran pengajaran dan pembelajaran untuk penulisan genre, serta konsep perancah dari Teori Perkembangan Kognitif Sosiobudaya. Reka bentuk kajian kes kaedah campuran selari konvergen telah digunakan untuk menilai prestasi penulisan 46 pelajar dalam eksperimen kuasi, serta mengkaji persepsi 23 pelajar. Data kuantitatif melalui markah praujian-pascaujian dan soal selidik telah ditriangulasi dengan data kualitatif melalui perbincangan kumpulan fokus. Penemuan

utama menunjukkan bahawa pendekatan genre berkesan dalam meningkatkan penulisan deskriptif pelajar, di mana pelajar memperoleh jumlah markah pasca ujian yang lebih tinggi ($\bar{x}=3.326$, $t_{22}=5.919$), dan sub-markah untuk organisasi ($\bar{x}=1.283$, $t_{22}=6.548$), kandungan ($\bar{x}=0.717$, $t_{22}=4.045$), pencapaian komunikatif ($\bar{x}=0.674$, $t_{22}=4.322$), serta bahasa ($\bar{x}=0.652$, $t_{22}=6.423$). Pendekatan genre juga mempunyai kesan yang lebih besar daripada pendekatan proses dari segi jumlah markah [$\bar{x}=1.391$, $F(1, 43)=4.221$] dan sub-markah untuk organisasi [$\bar{x}=0.496$, $F(1, 43)=4.179$]. Pelajar yang terdedah kepada instruksi genre secara umumnya menerima penggunaan pendekatan genre sebagai kerangka untuk mengatasi cabaran dalam pembelajaran penulisan deskriptif. Kesimpulannya, pendekatan genre mempunyai potensi untuk dilaksanakan di sekolah-sekolah menengah peribumi di Malaysia serta konteks pendidikan orang asli lain yang serupa. Selanjutnya, kajian ini dapat menjadi rujukan kepada pihak berkepentingan yang tertentu, serta para pengamal dan pendidik bahasa Inggeris dalam hal menganjurkan pendekatan genre demi mengajar penulisan dalam konteks EFL.

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ABSTRACT

The indigenous Orang Asli in Malaysia who do not use English on a daily basis consequently have low English proficiency and poor writing skills. Their existing English as a foreign language (EFL) situation coupled with the ongoing problems in gaining access to proper education further stifles their English language development. In accordance with the long-term goals set by the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2015-2025 (MEB) and the fourth sustainable development goal of providing inclusive and equitable quality education to the indigenous community, this study assesses the effectiveness of the genre approach in improving secondary EFL Orang Asli students' descriptive writing, and discovers their perceptions in using the genre approach as a framework to overcome challenges in learning descriptive writing. The conceptual framework encompasses Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), the teaching and learning cycle for genre writing, and the concept of scaffolding from the Sociocultural Theory of Cognitive Development. A convergent parallel mixed methods case study design was employed to assess the writing performances of 46 students in a quasi-experiment, and discover the perceptions of 23 students. Quantitative data via pretest-posttest scores and questionnaire were triangulated with the qualitative data via focus group discussions. The key findings highlight that the genre approach was effective in improving students' descriptive writing, in which students obtained higher total posttest scores ($\bar{x}=3.326$, $t_{22}=5.919$), and sub-scores for organisation ($\bar{x}=1.283$, $t_{22}=6.548$), content ($\bar{x}=0.717$, $t_{22}=4.045$), communicative achievement ($\bar{x}=0.674$,

$t_{22}=4.322$), and language ($\bar{x}=0.652$, $t_{22}=6.423$). The genre approach also had a larger effect than the process approach in terms of total scores [$\bar{x}=1.391$, $F(1, 43)=4.221$] and sub-scores for organisation [$\bar{x}=0.496$, $F(1, 43)=4.179$]. Students who were exposed to genre instruction were generally receptive towards the use of the genre approach as a framework to overcome challenges in learning descriptive writing. In conclusion, the genre approach has the potential to be implemented in Malaysian indigenous secondary schools and other similar indigenous' educational contexts. Furthermore, this study can be a point of reference to stakeholders, English language practitioners and educators in terms of advocating the genre approach for teaching writing in an EFL context.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

In the current era, English is used by people worldwide for international collaboration, networking, communication and business (Crystal, 2003; Education First, 2021; Weedmark, 2019), including Malaysia where English is a strong second language (Baskaran, 1988). According to Eberhard, Simons, and Fennig (2021), English is currently the most spoken language worldwide with approximately 1.348 billion users around the world. The role of English as the modern lingua franca makes learning English as a second or additional language extremely beneficial for exploring new opportunities at a global level. The importance of English in today's era is apparent; it is the dominant language for STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics), education, travelling, entertainment, the internet and social media amongst many others. The emerging trend of English proficiency courses being offered worldwide shows how the current society perceives English as a must-learn language for survival.

In order to be proficient in any language, one must learn and acquire the four basic language skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening. Although all four skills are equally important in mastering a certain language, the art of writing is considered to be the most difficult due to its technicality, and as such more emphasis needs to be placed on the quality of writing. Writing is a crucial skill in the workplace as information is constantly circulated through written documents (e.g. letters, e-mails, reports), and being able to write effectively is a valuable asset treasured by companies alike (National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2019). Malaysian school students are taught the four basic language skills, including writing, and they are

expected to be proficient when joining the working sector, as seen in the 2021 Education First English Proficiency Index where Malaysia was labelled a Moderate Proficiency country with a score of 562, ranking 28th globally, and 3rd in South East Asia (Education First, 2021).

The Malaysian education system is administered by Ministry of Education Malaysia (KPM), and its education policy recognises English as a second language (ESL) (Curriculum Development Division, 2003, 2018). English is taught as a compulsory subject in all national and national-type schools in Malaysia divided according to the medium of instruction (with Malay and Mandarin/Tamil respectively), but it is not a compulsory pass for students in all their examinations. These schools make up the primary and secondary levels; national primary schools (SK), national-type primary schools (SJK), national secondary schools (SMK), and national-type secondary schools (SMJK). Education in Malaysia also consists of boarding schools, private schools, and schools catered to religious and vocational studies.

Students start their primary education at the age of 7, beginning from Year 1 to 6 when they sit for their Primary School Evaluation Test (UPSR), which has since been recently abolished (Radhi, 2021). After UPSR, most students proceed to Form 3, where students would then sit for the school-based Form Three Assessment (PT3). For PT3 English, the four language skills are evaluated based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), and students are expected to be independent users of English, which is the B1 proficiency level (The Star, 2019). After PT3, students then proceed to Form 5 where they will sit for the Malaysian Certificate of Examination (SPM). Although there is only one English 1119 paper, two grades are awarded; one by the Malaysian Examinations Syndicate, and another by Cambridge

International Examinations, with the latter only assessing the writing component based on GCE ‘O’ standards. New changes to the examination format were made in accordance to the implementation of the CEFR-aligned English curriculum (Hamzah, 2019; The Star, 2019). Malaysian students go through 11 years of formal English instruction in classrooms, and more if they attended pre-school or continue learning it in colleges and universities. Considering the importance of English in Malaysia for oral communication, official functions, politics, media and others (Thirusanku & Yunus, 2012), students under the national education should be able to communicate English adequately (Omar & Noor, 1981), since the society in Malaysia is a polyglot and pluralistic one with bilingual and even multilingual learners. But the reality is that students leaving secondary schools are still deficient in English skills (Darmi & Albion, 2013; Yamat, Fisher, & Rich, 2014) with half of them obtaining a failing ‘O’ level grade for the writing component of SPM 2011 (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). This is especially true for the rural Orang Asli, the underrepresented Malaysian indigenous minority, who have poor English writing skills (Kassim & Adnan, 2005; Khan, 2017; Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2018).

Based on the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 (MEB) which provides an action plan for improving the country’s education system, the aforementioned governmental initiatives were successful in steadily narrowing the achievement gap between rural and urban schools (Examinations Syndicate, 2020a; Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013, 2017). Nonetheless, students in rural schools still possess low English proficiency levels resulting in high failure rates (Juin, 2016; Wreikat, Kabilan, & Abdullah, 2014; Yunus & Mat, 2014). The fact that there is an English proficiency gap between urban and rural students as reported by the Malay Mail (2018) clearly shows that not much is being done to help the Orang Asli learn English better,

especially in terms of writing skills. Hence, there is a need to look into viable English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching practices that can enhance their writing. Among the various methods of teaching EFL writing, the popular forms are the product approach, process approach and genre approach.

Although the current CEFR-aligned English curriculum lists process writing as the main core of the writing component, past research has shown that product writing (i.e. to provide models for students to merely replicate as a means to an end) is commonly practised in the Malaysian EFL classroom due to factors of time, workload and student needs (Chow, 2007; Palpanadan, Ismail, & Salam, 2015a; Palpanadan, Salam, & Ismail, 2014; Pour-Mohammadi, Abidin, & Cheong, 2012). This is problematic as the product approach encourages students to learn writing through rote memorisation and replication, as opposed to learning via brainstorming, planning, drafting and revising. Consequently, the failed attempts of putting theory into practice results in a band-aid solution that does not fulfil the expected learning outcomes and objectives of the current English syllabus. Given the context of the situation, the genre approach to writing may prove viable of helping Orang Asli students write better than the process approach, since the genre approach is a modified and extended version of the product approach (Badger & White, 2000; Swift, 2017).

Under the genre approach, the teacher does not merely teach. Rather, the teacher cooperates with students in helping them acquire written genres and text types. In the context of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), students learn the cultural meanings and purpose of a language by understanding a genre's structural and realisational patterns. Written genres are taught using the teaching and learning cycle for genre writing (Rose & Martin, 2012) where the teacher provides optimum scaffolding based on the learning needs of the student. The teacher first provides

textual models of a particular genre for students to digest, followed by recreating the genre text together, and lastly encouraging students to attempt writing independently. The cycle is then repeated with another genre, and so on. As the genre approach incorporates writing activities in its lessons and encourages teacher-student collaboration, this approach will encourage student engagement given the fact that Orang Asli students are receptive to fun, interesting and meaningful learning (Aziz & Taha, 2018; Khan, 2017; Wahab & Mustapha, 2015).

The educational issues in the Malaysian context provide a challenge for stakeholders in achieving the long-term goals set by MEB to improve the country's English language standards, further narrow the achievement gap between urban and rural schools, and provide educational equity to the Orang Asli community (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). It also aims to fulfil the gap in the literature since research on Orang Asli students' English writing skills is scarce, especially for secondary schools. Therefore, the main purpose of the study is to investigate the effect of the genre approach in improving secondary EFL Orang Asli students' descriptive writing in a selected school in Pahang. By looking into the effectiveness of the approach on students' writing performance and their perceptions towards the genre writing lessons, this study has its important implications for EFL writing pedagogies for the Orang Asli as well as low proficiency students in rural secondary schools.

1.2 Background of the Study

The background of the study aims to provide the context for the study. Specifically, it discusses the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 in the context of ESL pedagogy, the English Language Education Roadmap, the current Malaysian English language syllabus, and Orang Asli students' EFL writing skills.

1.2.1 Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025

The Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 (Preschool to Post-Secondary Education) was developed by KPM as a means of evaluating the country's preschool, primary, secondary and pre-university education system against global standards. In essence, it provides step-by-step action plans for transforming the current education system into one that can meet the country's demands, spanning three waves over 13 years. Amongst the various educative aspects covered in the blueprint, the current Wave 2 aims to accelerate the improvement of ESL pedagogy by:

1. Rolling out secondary (KSSM) curriculum to raise content and learning standards to international benchmarks;
2. Piloting options to increase English language exposure, and strengthening additional language provision to improve overall language proficiency;
3. Enhancing programmes for groups with specific needs such as indigenous and other minority groups, gifted, and special needs; and
4. Enhancing teacher coaching and support to improve delivery of knowledge, skills, and values across all academic and non-academic aspects of curriculum.

(Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013, p. E-25)

Based on the objectives established in MEB, this study is relevant to the ongoing demand of transforming Malaysian ESL and EFL pedagogy into one that can develop individuals who are equipped to work in a globalised economy where the English language is the international language of communication (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). MEB provides creative classroom pedagogic strategies for improving students' English, essentially in the form of a new Secondary School Standards-Based Curriculum (KSSM). This syllabus emphasises on developing students' Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) to help them attain expected competencies according to established standards in the curriculum. The modular system allows for the integration of the 21st century classroom concept, focussing on

student-centric learning and differential learning needs rather than academic and cognitive output (Azman, 2016).

1.2.2 English Language Education Roadmap for Malaysia

The English Language Education Roadmap for Malaysia 2015-2025, an extension of MEB 2013-2025 (English Language Standards and Quality Council, 2015), introduces the revision of the English syllabus to align with the benchmark set by the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for languages, shifting to a “more action-oriented approach” (Sidhu, Kaur, & Chi, 2018, p. 452). Besides boosting the education level to meet international standards, the reform also enables learners to be competent in the language, and participate in professional and academic contexts ranging from primary to tertiary levels (Azman, 2016).

Innovations are brought to pedagogy and especially assessment, integrating formative (monitoring students’ progress and providing ongoing feedback) and summative (evaluating students at the end of the course) school-based assessments. According to Sidhu et al. (2018), the CEFR-based English language curriculum “emphasises both peer and self-assessment as necessary components for the development of autonomous language learners” (p. 452). Simply put, students are guided by teachers to self-assess their own language learning; teachers guide and scaffold students to help them locate learning objectives and self-assess their learning progress. This new English syllabus started with the first cohort of Form 1 in 2017.

1.2.3 The Standards-Based English Language Curriculum

Since the introduction of teaching English through the enactment of the New Education Policy in 1970, the English language curriculum has gone through several reformations based on pedagogical trends and issues. Based on the aforementioned

roadmap, the most recent syllabus is the Standards-Based English Language Curriculum (SBELC) in line with KSSM. According to the Curriculum Development Division, SBELC emphasises literacy and communication skills equally to invoke students' criticality, creativity, reasoning skills and thinking strategies (Curriculum Development Division, 2018). Students are taught the four language skills and the aspects of Grammar and Literature in Action at least 112 hours per year, covering the five modules bundled into four themes: 1) People and Culture, 2) Health and Environment, 3) Science and Technology, and 4) Consumerism and Financial Awareness. This allocation of English class duration is important as "English literacy in Malaysia is generally acquired through schooled English" (Azman, 2009 as cited in Musa, Lie, & Azman, 2012, p. 39).

1.2.4 Orang Asli Students' EFL Writing Skills

The Orang Asli consists of collective indigenous tribes grouped according to their ethnolinguistic backgrounds in Peninsular Malaysia. Although the CEFR-aligned English language syllabus shared among urban and rural schools emphasises the teaching of English as a second language, the reality is that Orang Asli students under the mainstream curriculum learn and use English as their foreign language (EFL), mostly through formal instruction due to the infrequent use of English in their everyday lives. Even so, overall education for the Orang Asli is problematic caused by socio-economic factors including the existing language barrier between Orang Asli students and non-indigenous teachers, difference of culture, poverty, accessibility of teaching and learning facilities, peer pressure from dropouts, and early marriage (Abdullah, Mamat, Zal, & Ibrahim, 2013). In attempt to improve the education for the Orang Asli, governmental bodies such as KPM and the Department of Orang Asli

Development (JAKOA) have collaborated to implement educational programmes specifically catered to the indigenous population (e.g. KAP and K9), improve school infrastructure and build new schools (Razak, 2019a).

Based on UPSR 2017 English results, Orang Asli students were found to have more difficulty passing Paper 2 (Writing) than Paper 1 (Comprehension), with failure rates of 42% and 33% respectively, indicating that they struggle in writing more than reading (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2018). Those who obtained an ‘E’ grade did not achieve the minimum standard set by the Malaysian Examinations Syndicate, having limited mastery of words and vocabulary, agrammatical sentences, and a messy and unattractive presentation and generation of ideas (Examinations Syndicate, 2019). At this point, students who did not perform well in UPSR English still proceed to secondary school. They will find it harder to cope with secondary-level English as “they still need to master the skills of writing in order to prepare for higher education level” (Rahim, Rustam, Primsuwan, Amat, Yusof, & Tahir, 2017, p. 15467). Consequently, their failure rate of the Writing paper is higher than the national average, with 42% and 14.4% respectively, contributing to the fact that Orang Asli students have poor writing skills.

Besides statistical data from KPM, very few studies looked into Orang Asli’s English writing skills and challenges, in which Khan (2017) and Kassim and Adnan (2005) had previously done so. Khan (2017) conducted a study on 32 Orang Asli students in Pahang, concluding that their English writing had improved after the Literacy and Numeracy (LINUS) 2.0 programme. Kassim and Adnan (2005) conducted a case study on 100 Orang Asli primary school students in Perak, and found that their English writing performance was very low. The lack of literature on the effect

of the writing approaches in the Orang Asli classroom clearly shows this study's novelty of implementing the genre approach for teaching EFL writing.

Aside from writing skills, past studies investigated the needs of Orang Asli students to improve their English language skills, in which they prefer learning through hands-on activities that are fun, interesting and meaningful (Aziz & Taha, 2018; Khan, 2017; Wahab & Mustapha, 2015; Yamat et al., 2014). They also look forward to classes that encourage active learning and participation (Zahari, 2014). According to Mihat (2016), there is a need of a positive pedagogical approach that can fulfil these requirements, prioritise in developing children's confidence (Yamat et al., 2014), and also be culturally responsive (Renganathan, 2013; Thanabalan, Siraj, & Alias, 2015) to enhance Orang Asli students' English skills.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Although Malaysian students have experienced 11 years of compulsory English language education (Primary Year 1 to Secondary Form 5), many still have poor English writing skills (Ahmad, 2014; Hiew, 2012; Jalaluddin, Awal, & Bakar, 2008; Juin, Swanto, & Din, 2021; Renganathan, 2021; Yamat et al., 2014) as seen from their performance in their final secondary school examination, SPM. Based on SPM 2019 English 1119 results, about 1 in 5 students (19.5%) failed the paper (Examinations Syndicate, 2020a). In SPM 2011, more students failed the GCE O-Level grading focussing on the writing component compared to the overall SPM grading, with 50% and approximately 20% students respectively (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013), suggesting that half of the student population do not meet the minimum standards of writing set by the Cambridge International Examinations. In addition, the implementation of teaching process writing in the English classroom

over the years still resulted in poor writing competencies among Orang Asli secondary students. According to KPM, their English writing passing rate was lower than the national average (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2018), and their low literacy levels were also reported by Kassim and Adnan (2011) and Khan (2017).

Students' low English proficiency will affect their future prospects of finding a job as they do not have adequate language skills to secure employment as well as to perform efficiently at work (Nair et al., 2012). English is widely used for workplace tasks and transactions in Malaysian companies, and so the demand for employees with good English skills is high, with 52% employers deciding not to employ fresh graduates due to their "poor command of the English language" (JobStreet.com, 2018, p. 2). Employees faced difficulties in writing for work because they lack the proficiency and mastery of the language (Ong, Leong, & Singh, 2011), with new graduates having inadequate writing (Nair et al., 2012). Considering that those from rural areas have low English proficiency, Orang Asli graduates would not have the chance to participate in the English-dominant economy, and as a result unable to improve their socio-economic status and standard of living.

Despite government-led initiatives to improve the education for the Orang Asli, many students still drop out with all-round poor academic performance (Nordin, Yahya, & Danjuma, 2018; Nordin, Yahya, Fern, Cherley, & Subramaniam, 2020) and even less made it to universities and colleges (Abdullah et al., 2013). Moreover, 84.9% students are still weak in literacy skills (Aini, Don, & Isa, 2019; Isa & Aini, 2018). Even though the participation rate of Orang Asli in tertiary education has improved over the years, with 563 students representing 0.13% of the total university student population in 2015, and 220 graduands in 2017 (Bahagian Perancangan dan Penyelarasan Dasar, 2018), they are still underrepresented in primary and secondary

schools, with the Education Minister stating that more than 700 were left out in 2018 (Lu, 2019).

When it comes to learning English in the EFL classroom, Orang Asli students are known to be shy and avoid taking the initiative to ask the teacher questions regarding the lesson (Wahab & Mustapha, 2015). This makes the teaching and learning process much more difficult as teachers are already not familiar with the Orang Asli, properly trained to deal with the students, or lack guidance and support (Mihat, 2015). Another issue is that students may find the current education system as irrelevant to them since they are not taught to be proud of their own heritage, only learning “mainstream culture, social and economic life” (Renganathan, 2016, p. 283). As such, these factors need to be considered when dealing with Orang Asli students’ challenges and barriers during the learning process. Besides continuous improvement, their strengths must also be identified so that Orang Asli education becomes sustainable, allowing the community to thrive (Rabahi, Yusof, & Awang, 2016). According to Mihat (2016), there is a need of a positive pedagogical approach that can fulfil these requirements, prioritise in developing children’s confidence (Yamat et al., 2014), and also be culturally responsive (Renganathan, 2013; Thanabalan, Siraj, & Alias, 2015) to enhance Orang Asli students’ English writing skills.

In-depth studies on writing approaches have been done for ESL classrooms in Malaysia (Chow, 2007; Din, 2016), with few studies on the genre approach (Dripin, 2010; Yap, 2005). Although past research focussed on low proficiency EFL Malaysian rural secondary school students’ English writing skills (Aziz & Aziz, 2019; Jalaluddin, Yunus, & Yamat, 2011; Sovakandan, Jaganathan, & Husain, 2017; Swanto & Din, 2014), few studies were conducted on Orang Asli primary students (Kassim & Adnan, 2005; Khan, 2017), with none on secondary students. Hence, there is a need to see

whether the genre approach can help Orang Asli students write better compared to the process approach set by the Malaysian secondary school syllabus (KSSM). Seeing that there are no studies done to date, this research serves to fulfil the gap and contribute to the limited literature.

The genre approach can be used to teach a variety of written genres. For this study, the descriptive genre is chosen based on the required text styles listed in the Form 4 English curriculum specifications. By introducing the descriptive genre to Orang Asli students, this study prepares them for their SPM English examination in the following year. There is a possibility that the genre can appeal to Orang Asli students as they would be able to relate to descriptive texts with their background knowledge and find it easy to comprehend them. It may also give them the ability to encapsulate thoughts into words by using their five senses. To facilitate the visualisation of real-life scenarios, students are taught to write descriptive accounts about people, and also create a story describing an event.

The underlying theories and general elements of the genre approach include Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014), the teaching and learning cycle for genre writing (Rose & Martin, 2012), and the concept of scaffolding from the Sociocultural Theory of Cognitive Development (Vygotsky, 1978), all encompassed in the conceptual framework of the study. The novelty of the study underlies a conceptual model for the classroom's teaching and learning process, and the framework is crucial for guiding the study in enhancing EFL Orang Asli students' writing. In order to address the gap, which is the lack of EFL writing pedagogical studies conducted among the Orang Asli, the aim of the study is to investigate the effects of the genre approach in improving secondary EFL Orang Asli students' descriptive writing.

1.4 Research Objectives

1. To assess the effectiveness of the genre approach in improving secondary EFL Orang Asli students' descriptive writing.
2. To discover secondary EFL Orang Asli students' perceptions in using the genre approach as a framework to overcome challenges in learning descriptive writing.

1.5 Research Questions

1. To what extent is the genre approach effective in improving secondary EFL Orang Asli students' descriptive writing?
2. What are the perceptions of secondary EFL Orang Asli students in using the genre approach as a framework to overcome challenges in learning descriptive writing?

1.6 Significance of the Study

Firstly, this study contributes to the literature on English writing of the Orang Asli and gives voice to the underrepresented community. In the context of EFL writing, literature on the Orang Asli is scarce, showing a dire need for this study to fill the void. By exploring the effects of the genre approach on Orang Asli students' writing, its potential can be evaluated for it to be implemented in rural schools.

The findings of this study also contribute to literature on low proficiency Malaysian school students' English writing skills. Although studied extensively in the global context, a genre approach to writing has not been done for Malaysian rural secondary schools. Hence, this study sheds light on the practicality of the genre approach in other English writing contexts.

Next, this study contributes to the teaching and learning process in the Orang Asli classroom. Teachers can further improve their current methods of teaching writing that caters to their students' needs. Students will be able to write proficiently and meet the required standards set by the examinations syndicate. The findings will also provide a reference for future researchers on the effectiveness of the genre approach in the context of English language education in Malaysia.

Furthermore, this study is significant in addressing the long-term goals established by MEB to improve Orang Asli education and further narrow the urban and rural gap in schools. Policy makers from KPM can incorporate the genre approach into the English syllabus for teaching writing in Orang Asli schools, in aim to accomplish the mission of bridging the achievement gap between urban and rural secondary schools.

Lastly, the current pedagogical trend encourages educational research in line with the fourth sustainable development goal set by the United Nations, which is inclusive and equitable quality education for all people. The findings of this study advocates for equal access to all levels of education for indigenous peoples (UN General Assembly, 2015).

1.7 Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this study include constraints on the research procedure and the generalisability of the findings on other English writing contexts.

Primarily, the research procedure was affected by the pandemic caused by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and the subsequent implementation of several Movement Control Orders (MCO) by the Malaysian government throughout the duration of the study, especially in terms of time constraints and safety protocols. In

preparation for the study, teachers involved had to be briefed and trained online via Google Meet, since schools were closed during MCO. Also, updated permissions had to be sought by relevant authorities to conduct the research under pandemic-related regulations.

The scope of the study involves Senoi Orang Asli Form 4 students in a rural secondary school in Pahang, Malaysia. As the study only involves a specific Orang Asli group, the selected sample is not representative of the general characteristics of all upper secondary students in Malaysian national schools. Only one school was chosen based on the notion that students at the same school and grade level share similar education backgrounds and schooling experiences, which minimised the internal threats of validity in a quasi-experiment. Based on the criterion of a large number of students sufficient to carry out the quasi-experiment, the school with the highest number of Form 4 Orang Asli students in Pahang was selected based on the statistical data provided by the Pahang State Education Department (JPN Pahang).

1.8 Definition of Terms

These are the definitions and explanations of general terms frequently used in this study.

EFL: EFL refers to English as a foreign language. Even though English is a strong second language in Malaysia (Baskaran, 1988) with support from education and language policies, Malaysians from rural areas do not get much exposure to English, preferring to use Malay in government-related tasks and their respective native languages at home. Kirkpatrick (2014) states EFL as English that “is not actually used or spoken very much in the normal course of daily life, and typically learned at school” (p. 27), which is the reality for many Orang Asli students – the lack of language

exposure combined with little use makes English their foreign language. The context of EFL has its implications on the need for differing pedagogical strategies (Lake, 2020).

Genre: In the context of linguistics, the term refers to “a distinctive category of discourse of any type, spoken or written” (Swales, 1990, p. 33), and “abstract, socially recognised ways of using language” (Hyland, 2007, p. 150). According to the British Council (2020), genre consists of types of spoken or written discourse classified by content, language, purpose and form. The typical features of genre are the purpose of communication, themes, conventions, medium, the reader (audience) and writer. Hence, text types of the same genre share similar linguistic features and communication purposes. For this study, genre refers to the four types of written genres based on the purpose of communication – descriptive, expository, narrative and persuasive, in which descriptive writing is the focus of the study.

Genre Approach: The term refers to a form of writing approach that “focuses on the understanding and production of selected genres of texts” (Lin, 2006, p. 69). Hasan and Akhand (2010) states that the genre approach views “writing as a social and cultural practice” (p. 81). Compared to the product and process approaches, it is a relatively new branch of teaching and learning English writing that views “genre as a product in writing” (Dirgeyasa, 2016, p. 47). This meant that for any given text, there exists a relationship between the language used and its purpose, context and situation. Therefore, each written genre has its own distinctive features of organisation, rhetoric structure, and linguistic features.

Descriptive Writing: Descriptive writing is a type of writing that provides a clear and concise description of everything (Faucher, 2020). It aims to create an impression of an idea using “precise sensory words and phrases, and devices such as

metaphor and the sounds of words” (McCarthy, 1998, p. 5). Literary devices are used to evoke the five human senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch) to provide a clear image of the object, person or place in the writer’s mind (White, 2019). According to McCarthy (1998), descriptive writing is unique as it appears in other forms of writing; it exists in expository (description to present facts clearly), narrative (to show clearly what’s happening), and persuasive (strong descriptive words to present and support opinions). It is also powerful and appealing as it brings the writer’s world within the text to the reader – the reader uses their senses and background knowledge to paint a picture of what the reader is trying to convey (Faucher, 2020; White, 2019).

Orang Asli: The term ‘Orang Asli’, translated from Malay as ‘original or first people’, refers to the collective indigenous tribes from Peninsular Malaysia. They consist of 18 ethnolinguistic groups with their own respective language and cultures (Masron, Masami, & Ismail, 2013), broadly categorised into the Negrito, Senoi, and Proto-Malay based on their geographical locations of Northern, Central, and Southern regions respectively. Although native to Peninsular Malaysia, the ethnic groups make up the Malaysian minority, representing only 0.55% of the entire population in 2018 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2018). Affairs related to the economy, health, education and general livelihood of the Orang Asli is managed by JAKOA.

1.9 Conclusion

This chapter presented the background of the study in the context of EFL writing for Orang Asli secondary students. The statement of the problem was introduced with supporting evidence in order to establish the underlying gap and novelty of the study. The significance of the study in relevance to various stakeholders

was highlighted, and its limitations were outlined with justifications. The terms frequently used in the study were also defined via credible sources.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to provide a systematic review of literature on 1) the education background and English proficiency of the Orang Asli, 2) writing approaches for teaching EFL writing, 3) current pedagogical issues of EFL writing in Malaysia, 4) related studies of the genre approach in both global and Malaysian contexts, and 5) the conceptual framework of the study.

2.2 The Orang Asli in Malaysia

The term ‘Orang Asli’, translated from Malay as ‘original or first people’, refers to the collective indigenous tribes from Peninsular Malaysia. Other labels include ‘Orang Asal’ (including the indigenous people from East Malaysia), ‘Maniq’, and the formerly used ‘Malayan aborigines’ (Ooi, 2004). The Orang Asli consists of 18 ethnolinguistic groups with their own respective language and cultures (Masron et al., 2013), broadly categorised into the Negrito, Senoi, and Proto-Malay based on their geographical locations of Northern, Central, and Southern regions respectively. According to the Department of Orang Asli Development (JAKOA) under the Malaysian Ministry of Rural Development (KPLB), there are a total of 178197 Orang Asli, with the Senoi being the most populous (97856), followed by Proto-Malay (75332) and Negrito (5009) as of June 2018 (JAKOA, 2018). Together, the Orang Asli make up the Malaysian minority, representing only 0.55% of the entire population of the same year (JAKOA, 2018).

According to JAKOA (2018), the Orang Asli generally live in the 853 small-sized villages located in rural and remote areas, with individual families living in cities

and towns who have integrated into modern society. Many of these villages have been largely neglected by the government in favour of urban development, with some having limited to no access to basic needs such as electricity and clean water (Lai, 2019; Razak, 2019b; SUHAKAM, 2019). Despite job opportunities and a better quality of life offered in urban areas and government-supported permanent settlements (e.g. FELDA), most are reluctant to leave their villages as being with nature is their way of life (Razak, 2019b); they are highly dependent on the natural environment for their survival needs and financial income (Aziz & Taha, 2018). Given the fact that the Orang Asli sell and trade forest goods for a living, the eviction of the Orang Asli from their traditional lands through excessive logging and development has caused them to lose their only source of income (Endicott, 2017). As a result, the Orang Asli are continuously “plagued by poverty and live their lives in constant lacking” (Yusoff, Halim, Omar, Pereira, & Salleh, 2018, p. 58). Based on statistical evidence provided by JAKOA (2018), 31.16% of Orang Asli households are categorised as poverty-stricken; 19.97% are poor and 11.19% are hardcore poor. In essence, marginalisation of the Orang Asli has led to poverty being one of the major factors of their poor education background (Abdullah et al., 2013; Singar & Zainuddin, 2017).

2.2.1 Education Profile of Orang Asli Students

Orang Asli students are generally underrepresented in schools. Based on enrolment data from the Malaysian Children’s Statistics 2019, Orang Asli students represent 0.99% and 0.70% of the primary and secondary school student populations respectively (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2019). By comparing both student populations in year 2018, it is evident that there exists a high dropout rate among secondary students (Nor, Roslan, Mohamed, Hassan, Ali, & Manaf, 2011). About three

in ten students drop out after completing primary education, resulting in fewer secondary students. According to KPLB (2018), the dropout rate between Primary Year 6 and Secondary Form 1 has decreased over the years, from 28.70% in 2009 to 17.00% in 2017. However, Lu (2019) reported that more than 700 students were still left out in 2018, which is still a major issue for the Orang Asli (SUHAKAM, 2019). Consequently, fewer students make it to universities and colleges (Abdullah et al., 2013), with only 596 tertiary students representing 0.11% of the total public university student population in year 2018, and 220 graduands of the same year (Ministry of Rural Development, 2018).

Even so, Orang Asli students who remain in schools suffer from all-round poor academic performance (Nordin et al., 2018, 2020). Based on a report by KPM (2018), the passing rate of Orang Asli students for UPSR 2017 was extremely low with 20.2% as opposed to the national average of 68.1%. This meant that about four out of five students do not achieve the minimum standards at the end of primary education, which is worrying as the cumulative nature of failure is bound to affect their secondary education (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). According to Nor et al. (2011), students who are already struggling to cope in schools may feel stressed and “unprepared for these [public] examinations” (p. 42) and thus play truant or even drop out entirely. There exists a cumulative dropout rate from Primary Year one to Secondary Form 5 based on the number of students taking UPSR (4226), PT3 (2398) and SPM (1570) in year 2015 (Ministry of Rural Development, 2017).

The School Management Division (BPSH) reported that attendance rate of Orang Asli in primary schools has been approaching the targeted value of 90.00%, with 87.35% attendance at the end of year 2018 (School Management Division, 2018). However, the attendance rate of secondary schools was not reported, suggesting a

prevailing low attendance (Mahmud, Amat, & Yaacob, 2009; Singar & Zainuddin, 2017; SUHAKAM, 2019). According to Hanafi, Ahmad and Ali (2014), the main factor is often the lack of parental support, in which students are discouraged from attending school in favour of taking care of family members or working with parents. Some are unable to attend classes constantly as they live far away from school, occasionally not having transport (Kamaruddin & Jusoh, 2008). As a result, the low attendance rate causes students to lose interest in school as they had fallen behind studies, eventually dropping out from school (Ali, Rahman, & Mohamed, 2011; Hasbullah, 2015).

Past research has attempted to uncover the factors leading to educational issues, such as the existing language barrier between Orang Asli students and non-indigenous teachers, difference of culture, accessibility of teaching and learning facilities, peer pressure from dropouts, and early marriage (Abdullah et al., 2013). The Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM) reported that the lack of school facilities such as untreated water and limited hours of electricity hinders the effective teaching and learning process (SUHAKAM, 2019). Other factors include poor family earnings, low level of academic achievement among parents, and parents' occupation (Shariffuddin, Nor, Lim, Rahamat, Bakri, & Abdullah, 2014; Singar & Zainuddin, 2017). Although Cheng, Yunus and Mohamad (2016) found that family's involvement in children's studies had the most impact towards English performance in the school, Yusof, Jalil, Yin, Mansor and Mahdinezhad (2017) argued that students still underachieved even though parents were fully committed in their children's studies, due to the lack of amenities at home caused by poverty.

Lee (2019) also stated that it could be caused by bullying, discrimination and the fear of losing their identity. According to Wahab and Mustapha (2015), Orang Asli

students are known to be shy and avoid taking initiative to ask the teacher questions regarding the lesson. This makes the teaching and learning process much more difficult as teachers are already not familiar with the Orang Asli, properly trained to deal with the students, or lack guidance and support (Mihat, 2015). According to Aziz and Taha (2018), Orang Asli children typically learn by imitating the norms set by their parents, but parents are not educated enough to successfully “influence their children’s learning process and academic performance” (Wong & Abdillah, 2018, p. 6). This leads to a situation where the teacher attributes the problem to parents, which in turn leads to parents blaming their children (students), and students indirectly blaming the teacher in a “vicious cycle of blame” (Rabahi et al., 2016, p. 121).

As such, these factors need to be considered when dealing with Orang Asli students’ challenges and barriers during the teaching and learning process. Besides continuous improvement, their strengths must also be identified so that Orang Asli education becomes sustainable, allowing the community to thrive (Rabahi et al., 2016).

2.2.2 Educative Measures by the Government

In response to the educational issues of the Orang Asli, the Malaysian government developed the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025 in favour of improving and standardising the education standard throughout the country, especially for rural and remote communities (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). Prior to the adoption of MEB, the government has introduced reforms in the school curriculum since 2007 with the help of JAKOA and KPLB in attempt to fulfil the needs of a differentiated and specialised education (Bakar, 2012), and an alternative syllabus (Mihat, 2015). This is because Orang Asli students have found the national curriculum (i.e. KSSR and KSSM) to be irrelevant to them since they are not taught to be proud