

**UNTRAINED ORANG ASLI PRESCHOOL
TEACHERS' BELIEFS AND PRACTICES IN
TEACHING ENGLISH TO ORANG ASLI
PRESCHOOLERS**

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PRESCHOOLERS**

by

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CEFR	Common European Framework of Reference for Languages
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CRP	Culturally Responsive Pedagogy
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
ECE	Early Childhood Education
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ELTC	English Language Teaching Centre
ERDT	Enhancing Reading Through Digital Text
ESL	English as a Second Language
FL	Foreign Language
ICESR	International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights
ICPS	Integrated Curriculum for Primary Schools
JAKOA	<i>Jabatan Kemajuan Orang Asli</i> (The Department of Orang Asli Development)
JHEOA	<i>Jabatan Hal Ehwal Orang Asli</i> (Department of Orang Asli Affairs)
KEMAS	<i>Jabatan Kemajuan Masyarakat</i> (Community Development Department)
L1	First language
L2	Second language
MOE	Ministry of Education
MQA	Malaysian Qualifications Agency
MQF	Malaysian Qualifications Framework

NGO	Non-governmental organisations
NPC	National Preschool Curriculum
PDK	<i>Pemulihan Dalam Komuniti</i> (Community-Based Rehabilitation)
PTM	<i>Persatuan Tadika Malaysia</i> (Malaysian Association of Kindergartens)
RYTHM	Raise Yourself To Help Mankind
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
SPM	<i>Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia</i> (Malaysian Certificate of Education)
SUKA	<i>Suara Kanak-Kanak</i>
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNDRIP	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
UTDBE	Untrained Teacher Diploma in Basic Education

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**KEPERCAYAAN DAN AMALAN GURU PRASEKOLAH ORANG ASLI
TIDAK TERLATIH DALAM PENGAJARAN BAHASA INGGERIS KANAK-
KANAK PRASEKOLAH ORANG ASLI**

ABSTRAK

Kajian kaedah campuran ini mengkaji kepercayaan dan amalan guru prasekolah Orang Asli yang tidak terlatih (n=12) berhubung pengajaran Bahasa Inggeris untuk pelajar prasekolah Orang Asli di lima buah prasekolah yang dikendalikan oleh Pertubuhan Bukan Kerajaan (NGO) (akan dirujuk sebagai NGO X dan NGO Y) di Perak, Malaysia. Dengan menggabungkan data kuantitatif daripada soal selidik dan pemerhatian bilik darjah dengan pandangan kualitatif daripada perbincangan kumpulan berfokus, penemuan penyelidikan ini menunjukkan konsensus yang kuat dalam kalangan guru mengenai kepentingan pendidikan awal Bahasa Inggeris untuk peluang akademik dan kerjaya. Namun, cabaran seperti tahap penguasaan Bahasa Inggeris yang terhad, sumber yang tidak mencukupi, dan halangan komunikasi menghalang pengajaran yang berkesan. Guru-guru ini menggunakan kedua-dua kaedah tradisional (contoh: latihan berulang) dan strategi interaktif (contoh: permainan, lagu), namun terdapat perbezaan antara kepercayaan dan amalan mereka: walaupun mereka menghargai pendekatan interaktif, pemerhatian bilik darjah menunjukkan pelaksanaan yang tidak konsisten disebabkan oleh keyakinan diri yang rendah dan latihan yang tidak mencukupi. Sebagai contoh, guru sering menggunakan pembelajaran jenis hafalan atau mengelakkan aktiviti kompleks yang mereka rasa tidak bersedia untuk melaksanakannya, yang mengakibatkan pengurangan penglibatan pelajar dan perkembangan kemahiran yang tidak sekata. Jurang-jurang ini menekankan keperluan untuk program pembangunan profesional yang disasarkan,

seperti bengkel mengenai pedagogi berasaskan aktiviti, pepadanan mentor antara guru yang tidak terlatih dengan pendidik yang berpengalaman, dan kit sumber yang relevan dari segi budaya (contoh: buku cerita dwibahasa, alat bantu visual). Penyelidikan masa depan harus meneroka kesan jangka panjang daripada intervensi tersebut dan memperluas pengambilan sampel ke prasekolah Orang Asli yang dikendalikan oleh kerajaan untuk menilai kebolehpercayaan. Dengan menangani kekurangan ini, pihak berkepentingan boleh mewujudkan persekitaran yang meningkatkan pemerolehan Bahasa Inggeris dan memperkasakan kanak-kanak Orang Asli untuk berjaya secara akademik dan sosial.

**UNTRAINED ORANG ASLI PRESCHOOL TEACHERS' BELIEFS AND
PRACTICES IN TEACHING ENGLISH TO ORANG ASLI
PRESCHOOLERS**

ABSTRACT

This mixed-methods study explores the beliefs and practices of untrained Orang Asli preschool teachers (n=12) regarding English language teaching for Orang Asli preschoolers in five NGO-run preschools (will be referred to as NGO X and NGO Y) in Perak, Malaysia. By integrating quantitative data from questionnaires and classroom observations with qualitative insights from focus group discussions, the findings reveal a strong consensus among teachers on the importance of early English education for academic and career opportunities. However, challenges such as limited English proficiency, inadequate resources, and communication barriers hinder effective teaching. Teachers employ both traditional methods (e.g., repetitive drills) and interactive strategies (e.g., games, songs), yet discrepancies between their beliefs and practices arise: despite valuing interactive approaches, classroom observations showed inconsistent implementation due to low confidence and insufficient training. For instance, teachers often defaulted to rote learning or avoided complex activities they felt unprepared to execute, resulting in reduced student engagement and uneven skill development. These gaps highlight the need for targeted professional development programs, such as workshops on activity-based pedagogy, mentorship pairing untrained teachers with experienced educators, and culturally relevant resource kits (e.g., bilingual storybooks, visual aids). Future research should explore longitudinal impacts of such interventions and expand sampling to government-run Orang Asli preschools to assess reliability. By addressing these gaps, stakeholders can

foster environments that enhance English acquisition and empower Orang Asli children to thrive academically and socially.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The early acquisition of English is increasingly recognized as critical for children's academic and future success, especially in multilingual societies like Malaysia. Among the Orang Asli, the indigenous peoples of Peninsular Malaysia, access to quality preschool education and effective English language instruction remains limited due to socioeconomic, cultural, and infrastructural challenges. Untrained teachers, often drawn from within Orang Asli communities, play a central role in delivering preschool education but face significant barriers, including a lack of formal training and resources. Understanding the beliefs and classroom practices of these teachers is essential for improving English language outcomes among Orang Asli preschoolers and for informing targeted support and professional development initiatives. This chapter provides the background and context for the study by examining the Orang Asli community, their educational landscape, the status of preschool provision, teacher education, teachers' beliefs and practices, and the current state of English language education at the preschool level.

1.2 Background of the Study

The background of the study aims to provide the context for the study. Specifically, it discusses the Orang Asli preschoolers, their teachers' education, their teachers' beliefs, and practices, and the English language education at the preschool level.

1.2.1 Orang Asli

Indigenous people are the earliest settlers in a given area; they are the indigenous people who arrived before others. There are more than 300 million indigenous people in the world, with one-third of them living in poverty (Kardooni et al., 2014). Indigenous Malaysians are known as Orang Asli or Orang Asal in Bahasa Malaysia. The precise translation of 'Orang Asli' in English is "original people," but 'Orang Asal' literally means "people of origin," implying that they are the indigenous inhabitants of Peninsular Malaysia and the natives of Sabah and Sarawak (Wook et al., 2022).

Orang Asli is said to be the first people to arrive in Peninsular Malaysia from the north, some 25,000 years ago (Coluzzi et al., 2017). In Malaysia, indigenous people are divided into three groups: Peninsular Orang Asli, Sabah natives, and Sarawak natives, with a total of 67 sub-ethnic groupings, accounting for over 14% of the total population (Amnesty International, 2018). Orang Asli is divided into three primary tribes: Negrito, Senoi, and Proto-Malays, according to *Jabatan Kemajuan Orang Asli* (JAKOA) [Department of Orang Asli Development] (2020); each tribe has a number of ethnic groupings. Kensiu, Jahai, Lanoh, Mendriq, Bateq, and Kintak are among the Negrito tribes. Second, Temiar, Jah Hut, Semai, MahMeri, Che Wong, and Semoq Beri make up the Senoi. Seletar, Kanaq, Jakun, Semelai, Teman, and Kuala make up the Proto-Malays. Furthermore, according to *Indigenous World 2020: Malaysia* (2020), Sarawak's Orang Asli community is divided into different sub-ethnic groups: Iban, Punan Bidayuh, Kedayan, Berawan, Kenyah, Sekapan, Penan, Bisayah, Kejaman, Kelabit, Ukit Kayan, Melanau, and Lunbawang. They number roughly 1,932,600 individuals, accounting for 70.5 per cent of Sarawak's total population of 2,707,600 (*Indigenous World 2020: Malaysia*, 2020). Meanwhile, the primary ethnic groups in

Sabah are the Bajau, Murut, Dusun, and Paitan – there are 39 ethnic groups – commonly known as natives or *Anak Negeri*; they account for around 2,233,100 people or 58.6% of the total population of 3,813,200 (Indigenous World 2020: Malaysia, 2020). If the Orang Asli does not clarify to which tribe they belong, Malaysians will generally refer to the indigenous peoples of Malaysia as 'Orang Asli'.

As for the Orang Asli preschoolers from indigenous communities in Malaysia, they face challenges in access to quality Early Childhood Education (ECE) due to limited resources for preschool infrastructure and qualified teachers in remote areas. The Orang Asli community makes up more than 14 per cent of the national population, but they often live in remote areas where there are limited resources for pre-school infrastructure and qualified teachers (Amnesty International, 2018). Plus, socioeconomic backgrounds, cultural beliefs and access to resources all have an important role in shaping the educational environment for these students (Mahdzar et al., 2021). This is worrying as Early Childhood Education (ECE) has been shown to be beneficial for cognitive development, social competence and future academic success (Duncan & Magnuson, 2000).

Studies have examined the challenges faced by Orang Asli children in learning to read and write in the context of language education. Studies on the language education of Orang Asli children have highlighted the need for culturally sensitive and effective language teaching methods and have highlighted the difficulties faced by students in mastering languages such as English and Malay (Letchamanan et al., 2021). According to Rabahi et al. (2017), studies have shown that despite exposure to English in the Malaysian education system, Orang Asli students often have difficulties with English proficiency.

Collectively, these studies highlight the necessity for a nuanced understanding of both teacher practices and student experiences within the context of Orang Asli education. Siti (2017) underscored the socio-cultural factors that influence educational outcomes for Orang Asli students, suggesting that a comprehensive understanding of these dynamics is essential for addressing educational disparities. This finding aligns with research by Mohd Sajat et al. (2023), which discusses the impact of cultural barriers on the educational experiences of indigenous students.

1.2.2 Orang Asli Education

The right of indigenous children to receive education "in their own culture and...in their language" is stated in Article 14.1(3) of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) (cited in Bauer, 2007, p.13). While much has been done to help Orang Asli children's education in Malaysia, there are still imbalances in their performance and achievement in schools when compared to non-Orang Asli children (Wan, 2020). The Orang Asli, Peninsular Malaysia's indigenous peoples, frequently lack access to education that respects their customs and culture (Copta, 2009). In comparison to other countries that have advanced in indigenous education, their rights to a good education, as guaranteed by international legal instruments such as the UNDRIP, the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights 1966 (ICESCR), and other legal provisions, cannot be realised.

Furthermore, existing studies often focus primarily on the challenges faced by Orang Asli students throughout their educational journeys (Sawalludin et al., 2020). One of the six development thrusts described in the Strategic Plan for Orang Asli Development 2011–2015 was a human development model and its relationship to education or literacy. The most recent strategic plan is a cooperation between *Jabatan*

Kemajuan Orang Asli (JAKOA) [The Department of Orang Asli Development] and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which intends to translate the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into important Orang Asli development initiatives until 2030. However, much more needs to be done to engage Orang Asli as stakeholders in policy problems that affect their community, one of which is education, in order to empower them as citizens with equal representation.

Indigenous people were present before the 1400s, according to history (Andaya & Andaya, 2017). Despite being one of Malaysia's first residents, the quality of the education gained falls short of the national average. According to a 2006 report by the Centre for Orang Asli Concerns, for every 100 Orang Asli children who enter Year 1, only about six are expected to make it to Form 5, 11 years later. According to the Ministry of Education (MOE), Orang Asli students made up 4% of the national student population in 2015 (Ministry of Education, 2016). According to recent figures, just 13,155 of the 26,571 students enrolled in secondary school (JAKOA, 2018).

Emphasising English language education is vital for promoting educational equity among the Orang Asli community in Malaysia. This emphasis is particularly important given the mandatory inclusion of English in Malaysian schools and the unique cultural backgrounds of Orang Asli children (Ganapathy et al., 2022). The outlook for Orang Asli children's education in meeting the National Education Blueprints targets is concerning, as stated in the preceding paragraph. While some argue that the difficulty of Orang Asli education is due to a lack of awareness among the community, particularly among parents (Mazzlida & Ruhizan, 2016; Sawalludin et al., 2020), other studies (Wan, 2020; Nicholas, 2005) imply otherwise. According to them, poverty significantly hinders the active participation of Orang Asli in the education

sphere. This means that the education system for Orang Asli is still far behind, and many of the teachers are untrained; in addition, they lack the resources to teach the Orang Asli. There is immense potential to improve educational outcomes for Orang Asli preschoolers by equipping untrained teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge for effective English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching within a culturally responsive framework (Al-Delaimy et al., 2014). This study investigates a previously unexamined gap in the literature on Orang Asli education.

1.2.3 Orang Asli Preschool

For a very long period, Orang Asli education, particularly preschool, was different from that of the other Malaysian communities. The syllabus and teachers' qualifications were different in such a way. There are no proper teaching processes being conducted for the Orang Asli community, particularly for preschool. Before 1995, *Jabatan Hal Ehwal Orang Asli* (JHEOA) [Department of Orang Asli Affairs], now known as *Jabatan Kemajuan Orang Asli* (JAKOA) [The Department of Orang Asli Development], oversaw the Orang Asli children's education (Md Nor et al., 2011). JHEOA operated a three-tiered educational program to help the Orang Asli students transition to the country's public-school systems (Kamaruddin & Jusoh, 2008). The first tier included village schools that were run and instructed by JHEOA field staff or teachers who had not had formal training, and these village schools provided education from Primary One to Three (Kamaruddin & Jusoh, 2008; Md Nor et al., 2011).

However, the effectiveness of JHEOA's educational initiatives was questioned by many in the education sector's upper management, leading the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE) to assume full responsibility for Orang Asli schools and their education (Mohd Noor, 2012). This transition was necessary because Orang Asli

preschool education lacked a sufficient syllabus, qualified teachers, and adequate resources (Md Nor et al., 2011). Historically, Orang Asli children spent their early years in rural schools without access to formal preschool education, highlighting the neglect of Orang Asli preschool education (Ali et al., 2020). Consequently, preschool children in Orang Asli communities have limited access to relevant early childhood education, underscoring the need for MOE to address this issue seriously.

Since 1995, the MOE has developed various educational initiatives and policies aimed at improving Orang Asli children's access to quality education. However, these efforts have predominantly focused on primary and secondary education, with preschool education receiving comparatively little attention (Md Nor et al., 2011; Sawalludin et al., 2020). Among government initiatives supporting Orang Asli preschool education are the *Pemulihan Dalam Komuniti* (PDK) [Community-Based Rehabilitation] program by MOE and early childhood education centres run by *Jabatan Kemajuan Masyarakat* (KEMAS) [Community Development Department]. KEMAS preschools are generally established in rural or suburban areas, often in response to local government requests (Md Nor, 2019).

In addition to government efforts, non-governmental organisations have played a vital role in supporting Orang Asli preschool education. For instance, since 2013, the Empower2Teach project by the SUKA Society (*Persatuan Kebajikan Suara Kanak-Kanak Malaysia*) has provided access to education for Orang Asli children in isolated communities such as Slim River, Gopeng, Pos Musoh, Gua Musang, and Kuala Rompin. As described in the Empowered2Teach (E2T) report 2021, the initiative supports children from underserved communities, many of whom have not experienced formal schooling or exposure to basic subjects such as English, Bahasa Malaysia, and

Mathematics, by facilitating a smoother transition into primary education (SUKA Society, 2021). Starting with five preschools in 2013, the project expanded to fifteen preschools across remote villages in Peninsular Malaysia and Sabah by early 2022, directly benefiting 227 Orang Asli children (SUKA Society, 2022).

1.2.4 Orang Asli Teachers' Education

To address the demands of the education sector, numerous governmental and private institutions in Malaysia provide pre-service teacher training. The Teacher Education Division of the Malaysian Ministry of Education (MOE) oversees 27 teacher training institutions. There is also the English Language Teaching Centre (ELTC), primarily used to train in-service teachers and directly reporting to the MOE. Trainee teachers engage in professional practice during their training to improve their knowledge, abilities, and experience as instructors in Malaysia and beyond.

It is widely recognised that trained and motivated teachers are essential to preventing learning difficulties and supporting struggling learners (Kwaah, 2021). Many developing countries prioritise employing teachers with effective pedagogical skills to improve student learning outcomes. In Malaysia, the articulation of teacher standards has been a key part of education transformation efforts to enhance quality and outcomes (Goh, 2012). The Malaysian Teacher Requirements, launched in 2009, aim to establish “high competency” standards and elevate the teaching profession. Preschool teachers under the Ministry of Education are required to receive training and certification, with most holding at least a diploma in education (Md Nor, 2011). For example, KEMAS preschool teachers undergo six months of training, and since 2013, the Ministry’s Teacher Training Division has offered courses to support teachers in attaining diploma-level qualifications. *Persatuan Tadika Malaysia* (PTM) [The

Malaysian Association of Kindergartens] requires NGO preschool teachers to complete annual training programs, including in-service courses on “Skills Training for Preschool Teachers” during school breaks (Md Nor, 2019).

However, the majority of preschool teachers in Orang Asli communities, especially those from within the community, lack formal teacher training. Village leaders known as *Tok Batin*, who are responsible for preserving laws, culture, and welfare, often select teachers based on their willingness to educate children rather than formal qualifications. Asmawi (2013) describes the *Tok Batin*’s role as a problem-solver and caretaker of community welfare, with their influence extending to education and socioeconomics (cited by Ali et al., 2020).

The highest education level attained by most Orang Asli is the *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (SPM) [Malaysia Certificate of Education], the national secondary school certificate. Bernama (2022) reported that attendance at the nearest school to Orang Asli settlements, Sekolah Kebangsaan Tohoi, was around 75–80%, but many students do not continue to tertiary education, with some dropping out during secondary school. This situation raises concerns about the educational attainment of Orang Asli children compared to other ethnic groups.

Non-profit organisations also play a vital role in supporting Orang Asli education. For example, the RYTHM Foundation, aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 4: Quality Education, emphasises projects that provide Orang Asli teachers with resources to promote learning and development (RYTHM Foundation, 2021). The Foundation also took an initiative to support the Empower2Teach project, initiated by the non-governmental organisation (NGO), SUKA Society, which focuses on teaching foundational literacy and numeracy skills to indigenous children.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, when local authorities temporarily closed the Kelas Komuniti Kampung Sungai Poh operated by SUKA Society, many Orang Asli children were left without access to learning resources due to limited internet connectivity in remote areas. In response, the RYTHM Foundation, through its Gift of Life initiative, supported the SUKA Society by donating exercise books to 200 preschool-aged children. These materials contributed to the development of foundational skills in vocabulary, writing, reading, and numeracy. The curriculum employed reflected that of urban nursery schools, thus allowing children in marginalised rural communities to engage with comparable educational content and expand their learning opportunities (RYTHM Foundation, 2021). This is proof that through these combined efforts, including government training programs and NGO initiatives, progress is being made to improve the quality and accessibility of education for Orang Asli preschool teachers and their students.

1.2.5 Teachers' Beliefs and Practices

One of the intriguing questions in language education is whether teachers' classroom practices impact preschool children's understanding and learning outcomes. In other words, it is necessary to consider whether teachers' practices and beliefs have any impact on the English language learning of their students (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2017). Teachers' beliefs encompass their personal philosophies, values, and understandings concerning language teaching and learning (Adnan et al., 2021). These beliefs act as a driving force behind their pedagogical decisions, classroom practices, and ultimately, student outcomes (Siddiqui et al., 2021). It is also an established fact that the beliefs of teachers have a significant impact on what they achieve and teach in the classroom, their attitudes, and the beliefs of their students. For instance, teachers

who hold positive beliefs about all students' potential for learning English are more likely to implement inclusive and effective teaching strategies (Guskey, 2000). The teachers' beliefs and practices will assist in shaping the learning environment, motivation, and linguistic ability of language learners.

In the context of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), the beliefs of the teacher become even more important. The teacher's understanding of language acquisition processes, the role of culture in learning, and the specific needs of diverse learners contribute to fostering a successful language learning environment (Psaltou-Joycey, 2018). Thus, in teaching especially foreign languages to preschool students, a teacher's beliefs and practices seem to be a significant variable to investigate, as it has a great chance of revealing how Orang Asli preschool teachers' beliefs and practices influence English language as English as a Foreign Language (EFL) among Orang Asli preschoolers. According to studies, teachers who have a strong understanding of SLA and use culturally responsive approaches are more effective in promoting student engagement and language development (Mardiningrum & Haikal, 2022). This emphasises the need for teachers in English as a Second Language (ESL) contexts to possess not only pedagogical skills but also a deep understanding of the unique challenges faced by second language learners.

Although the significance of teacher beliefs and practices in ESL contexts is well-established, there remains a significant gap in understanding the beliefs and practices of untrained teachers who play a crucial role in Orang Asli preschool settings (Al-Delaimy et al., 2014; Md Nor et al., 2011). Orang Asli children, a diverse group of indigenous peoples in Malaysia, often encounter difficulties in acquiring English due to limited exposure and cultural differences (Ganapathy et al., 2022). The recruitment of

untrained individuals to teach in Orang Asli preschools is common due to the shortage of trained teachers (Bernama, 2022). Recent research has also explored preschool teachers' beliefs and classroom practices, emphasising the importance of child-centred learning approaches (Phang et al., 2021). These insights could prove beneficial for untrained teachers in Orang Asli communities by highlighting effective pedagogical strategies. To promote educational equity within the Orang Asli community, it is crucial to understand these untrained teachers' beliefs and practices, particularly in relation to EFL teaching, so that objective intervention strategies can be developed.

Previous studies have often neglected the significant impact of teacher beliefs on classroom practices and student outcomes (Gess-Newsome et al., 2017; Neumann et al., 2019). By understanding these beliefs, a deeper insight into how untrained Orang Asli preschool teachers approach EFL teaching for Orang Asli preschoolers can be gained. Besides, this study can inform the development of targeted professional development programs by exploring the challenges faced by these teachers. Therefore, valuable insights can also be gained from exploring their perspectives on language learning, teaching approaches, and challenges. Ultimately, this understanding will contribute to the development of culturally responsive teaching strategies and improve educational opportunities for Orang Asli preschool children.

1.2.6 English as a Foreign Language (EFL) for Orang Asli

This study is framed within the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), reflecting the linguistic realities of the Orang Asli community in Malaysia. The Orang Asli's first language is their indigenous mother tongue, followed by Bahasa Melayu as their second language, with English typically learned as a foreign language or third language (Ganapathy et al., 2022; Idrus et al., 2023). Unlike English as a Second

Language (ESL) contexts, where English is widely used in daily communication and as a medium of instruction, English for the Orang Asli is primarily an academic subject taught in formal education settings with limited exposure outside school (Ganapathy et al., 2022; The Orang Asli Education: Preserving Equality or Imposing Hegemony?, 2021).

The Orang Asli face significant challenges in learning English due to their limited exposure to the language in everyday life, compounded by socio-economic and geographic factors such as remoteness of settlements and under-resourced schools (Ganapathy et al., 2022; SUHAKAM, 2019). Furthermore, national education policies emphasise Malay and English as mediums of instruction but often overlook the linguistic and cultural specificities of indigenous learners, leading to language barriers and comprehension difficulties (The Orang Asli Education: Preserving Equality or Imposing Hegemony?, 2021; Idrus et al., 2023). For example, Orang Asli students frequently struggle with Malay, their second language, which is the medium of instruction, and this further complicates their acquisition of English as a foreign language (Nor Azwahanum Nor Shaide et al., 2022).

Research shows that Orang Asli students' English proficiency is generally below the national average, with challenges in vocabulary, grammar, and writing skills, partly due to the mismatch between the national curriculum designed for ESL learners and the Orang Asli's EFL context (Ganapathy et al., 2022). The cultural distance between the curriculum content and the Orang Asli's lived experiences also contributes to low motivation and engagement (Idrus et al., 2023; Mihat, 2013).

Given this context, the present study's focus on untrained Orang Asli preschool teachers' beliefs and practices in teaching English as a foreign language is essential. It

aims to understand how these teachers navigate the complexities of EFL instruction within their unique cultural and linguistic environment. In particular, the study examines how their beliefs and practices are shaped by the specific challenges of teaching English to indigenous children. By focusing on how Orang Asli preschool teachers' beliefs and practices influence English language learning among Orang Asli preschoolers, this research provides valuable insights. Such understanding is crucial for developing culturally responsive pedagogies and targeted teacher training programs that can improve the effectiveness of English language education for Orang Asli preschoolers.

1.2.7 English Language Education Among Orang Asli at Preschool Level

The Orang Asli are a group of indigenous tribes grouped according to their ethnic and linguistic backgrounds in the Malaysian Peninsular. Although the English language curriculum of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) has been shared among urban and rural schools, the reality is that Orang Asli students, under the primary curriculum, learn and use English as their foreign language (EFL), mainly through formal education, as English is rarely used in their daily lives.

For Orang Asli students, English is a foreign language. As a result, their attitude towards learning is shaped by their perception of the language and has a direct impact on their level of proficiency and performance. In general, Orang Asli students do not make much use of English in their everyday life. Due to their limited English proficiency, when communicating with friends of either similar or different ethnic backgrounds, they prefer to converse in their native Orang Asli language and Bahasa Melayu, which is their second language. During only the English classes, Orang Asli students have opportunities to communicate and use English, but despite exposure to

English since as early as preschool, most of them prefer Bahasa Melayu and remain weak in English.

As mentioned before, in the effort to introduce English to preschoolers among Orang Asli, a non-governmental organisation (NGO) such as *Persatuan Kebajikan Suara Kanak-Kanak Malaysia* (SUKA Society) tried to initiate the Empower2Teach project (Empower2Teach Report, 2015) and supported by the RYTHM Foundation. Their goal is to educate and prepare potential Orang Asli as teachers to enable them to teach preschool children in their community. The village leaders (*Tok Batin*) would be the responsible persons to elect candidates who showed interest and have the potential to teach. The organisation helps potential teachers by providing teacher training and teaching materials for the organisation to operationalise them for teaching. Indeed, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) also play a crucial role in order to help these children in the Orang Asli community. They have to help find suitable teachers for the children to grow better and have a better education system.

However, in the same way that the English language is foreign to the Orang Asli students, the same is true for their teachers from their own community. Therefore, in order to develop more effective approaches to the teaching of preschool English in the Orang Asli community, it is necessary to understand the beliefs that are held by Orang Asli preschool English teachers who do not go through recognised teacher training by the government of Malaysia to be certified as teachers. In most instances, Orang Asli preschool teachers are recruited by NGOs regardless of their level of English proficiency, but it must be noted that the highest level of English proficiency of most of them is the *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (SPM) [Malaysia Certificate of Education] level, which does not meet the qualification required by the government for early childhood

education. The Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) (2024) in the 2nd Edition of Programme Standards: Early Childhood Education states that to ensure quality and professionalism in early childhood education, all preschools under the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE) require their teachers to hold a bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education (ECE) as a minimum qualification. The government is also encouraging early childhood teachers in the private sector to have at least a Diploma in Early Childhood Education as a minimum academic qualification. By 2025, all preschool teachers in Malaysia will be required to hold a Diploma in Early Childhood Education as a minimum qualification.

1.3 Statement of the Research Problem

Despite significant investments in education by the Malaysian government (Ministry of Finance Malaysia, 2021), the academic performance of Orang Asli students, the country's indigenous population, remains a cause for concern (Mohd Adnan et al., 2021). While initiatives address high dropout rates at the secondary level (Bernama, 2023), a crucial stage in a child's development is often overlooked: preschool education. This study focuses on the neglected gap concerning untrained Orang Asli preschool teachers and their impact on the English language learning of Orang Asli preschoolers.

Early childhood education plays a pivotal role in fostering academic and socio-emotional development (Md Nor et al., 2011). However, Orang Asli preschool education faces a unique set of challenges. Existing studies primarily focus on various teaching methods and their impact on student performance but tend to overlook a critical factor: how the beliefs and practices of untrained teachers influence the learning

outcomes of Orang Asli preschoolers (Md Nor et al., 2011). This lack of understanding hinders the development of effective pedagogical approaches tailored to this specific context.

The majority of Orang Asli preschool teachers teaching English are untrained and often recruited by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) (Mohd Adnan et al., 2021). While these NGOs provide some training, it often falls short of the comprehensive programs offered by government-approved bodies such as *Persatuan Tadika Malaysia* (PTM) [Malaysian Association of Kindergartens]. This disparity in teacher training creates a situation where the beliefs and practices shaping Orang Asli preschool education may not align with best practices or adequately address the specific needs of Orang Asli learners.

Further complicating the situation is the perception of English as a foreign language by Orang Asli students due to its limited use in daily life (Ganapathy et al., 2022). This necessitates culturally responsive teaching approaches that bridge the gap between students' existing knowledge and the target language. Untrained teachers, lacking specialised training in English language acquisition and culturally responsive pedagogy, might struggle to effectively address this challenge.

Studies highlight the crucial role of teachers' beliefs in shaping classroom practices and, ultimately, student learning outcomes (Gess-Newsome et al., 2017; Neumann et al., 2019). International literature consistently emphasises the importance of teachers' beliefs and practices as key factors influencing student achievement (Kyriakides & Creemers, 2008; UNESCO, 2016). Therefore, understanding the beliefs and practices of untrained Orang Asli preschool teachers is essential for several reasons.

Firstly, studying their teaching methods can provide valuable grassroots insights into effective approaches for Orang Asli communities. These insights can inform the development of culturally appropriate and context-specific training programs for Orang Asli preschool teachers. Secondly, examining how untrained teachers handle English language teaching can shed light on potential challenges and areas for improvement. This knowledge can be used to design targeted interventions that enhance language acquisition among Orang Asli preschoolers. Finally, bridging the gap in early childhood education is crucial for promoting educational attainment and equality for Orang Asli children. By understanding the current state of Orang Asli preschool education, we can work towards creating a more equitable education system that caters to the needs of all learners.

This study aims to fill the knowledge gap by investigating the beliefs and practices of untrained Orang Asli preschool teachers, particularly focusing on how these beliefs translate into classroom practices and how professional development programs influence both. By exploring these aspects, the study seeks to highlight the importance of teachers' beliefs and practices in Orang Asli preschool education. Ultimately, the goal is to inform the development of effective training programs and contribute to closing the achievement gap for Orang Asli students, promoting a more just and equitable education system for Malaysia's indigenous communities.

In all, this study aims to fill this knowledge gap by exploring how untrained Orang Asli preschool teachers' beliefs translate into classroom practices and how these practices affect English language learning. The findings will contribute to developing effective training programs and ultimately support efforts to close the educational

achievement gap for Orang Asli children, promoting equity in Malaysia's education system.

1.4 Research Objectives

Based on the research questions stated, this study has three research objectives, which are:

1. To explore untrained Orang Asli preschool teachers' beliefs in teaching English to Orang Asli preschoolers.
2. To examine untrained Orang Asli preschool teachers' practices in teaching English to Orang Asli preschoolers.
3. To investigate the extent to which untrained Orang Asli preschool teachers practice their beliefs in teaching English to Orang Asli preschoolers.

1.5 Research Questions

Based on the problem statements above, this study is conducted to answer the following questions:

1. What are the untrained Orang Asli preschool teachers' beliefs concerning teaching English to Orang Asli preschoolers?
2. What are the untrained Orang Asli preschool teachers' practices concerning teaching English to Orang Asli preschoolers?
3. To what extent do the untrained Orang Asli preschool teachers practice their beliefs in teaching English to Orang Asli preschoolers?

1.6 Significance of the Study

1.6.1 To the Researcher

This study delves into a critical area with limited existing knowledge—the beliefs and practices employed by untrained Orang Asli preschool teachers when instructing English to young learners. By illuminating these practices, the study contributes fresh insights to the field of teacher cognition in a unique educational context. Understanding the approaches adopted by these educators can inform future research on untrained teachers within the Malaysian preschool system, particularly regarding issues of equity and cultural sensitivity. This aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) — SDG 4: Quality Education, by promoting inclusive and equitable quality education, and SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities — by addressing educational disparities faced by indigenous communities. Such knowledge can guide further investigations into the specific challenges faced by Orang Asli preschool teachers and how these challenges might be addressed to ensure equitable access to quality early childhood education for all children.

1.6.2 To the Body of Knowledge in Early Childhood Education

The findings of this study hold significant implications for the broader body of knowledge within Early Childhood Education (ECE). By exploring the realities of English language teaching by untrained teachers in the Orang Asli preschool system, the study contributes to understanding effective pedagogical approaches in diverse educational contexts. It highlights the potential for untrained teachers to develop effective practices organically through their experiences, despite lacking formal training. Identifying these emergent strategies can inform the development of more

flexible and contextually relevant approaches to English language learning in ECE programs, particularly for the Orang Asli community. This supports SDG 4 (Quality Education) by fostering quality and inclusive education and contributes to SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) by promoting equitable learning opportunities.

1.6.3 To Orang Asli Preschool Teachers

The insights gleaned from this study can be directly applied to the professional development of Orang Asli preschool teachers. By shedding light on their existing beliefs and practices in teaching English, the study can inform the creation of targeted training programs that address their specific needs and build upon their strengths. These programs could focus on expanding their repertoire of teaching methods suitable for young learners, fostering confidence in using English as a medium of instruction, and providing strategies to navigate challenges associated with limited formal training. Ultimately, empowering Orang Asli preschool teachers with relevant knowledge and skills aligns with SDG 4's goal (Quality Education) of ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education.

1.6.4 To the Malaysian Education System

This study holds significance for improving the quality and equity of preschool education within the Malaysian system. By highlighting the challenges and opportunities faced by untrained Orang Asli preschool teachers in teaching English, the study can inform policy decisions and initiatives aimed at supporting these educators and ensuring equitable access to quality early learning experiences for Orang Asli children. Examining the effectiveness of practices employed by untrained teachers can encourage policymakers to consider alternative, culturally responsive approaches to

teacher training and development, leading to more flexible and contextually relevant programs within the Malaysian preschool system. Recognising the valuable contributions of untrained teachers and developing targeted professional development opportunities caters to their unique needs and supports SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) by promoting quality education and reducing inequalities in education.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

While this study offers valuable insights into the beliefs and practices of untrained Orang Asli preschool teachers in teaching English, it acknowledges certain limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. A critical evaluation of these limitations is essential to ensure the findings of this study are presented with appropriate nuance and to pave the way for future investigations in this area.

1.7.1 Sample Specificity and Size Reduction

The current study focuses on a specific sample of Orang Asli preschool teachers within a particular geographical region of Malaysia, specifically the Perak region, and under the auspices of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as the NGO X and NGO Y. This targeted sampling approach allows for an in-depth exploration of the experiences of this distinct group. Initially, the study included 17 untrained Orang Asli preschool teachers from 7 preschools affiliated with these organisations. However, prior to data collection, the sample size reduced due to several unavoidable factors. These included the discontinuation of certain preschools owing to a lack of enrolment among Orang Asli children, personal circumstances that led some teachers to resign, and a lack

of cooperation from specific preschool teachers. Consequently, the final sample comprised only 12 untrained Orang Asli preschool teachers from 5 preschools, with 2 preschools withdrawing from the original 7.

1.7.2 Limitations of Quantitative Data and Analysis

The quantitative component of this study was limited by a small sample of 12 untrained Orang Asli preschool teachers, which restricts the stability and generalizability of statistical results. Although the Shapiro-Wilk test suggested normality, its reliability is limited to small samples. The data, collected via Likert scales, are ordinal. Thus, academic reviewers recommended non-parametric tests like Spearman's rank correlation. However, Pearson's correlation was retained for consistency with prior studies and ease of interpretation. This choice is justifiable because Pearson's correlation can be appropriate when data approximate interval properties, even with small samples, particularly in exploratory master's level research. Importantly, the quantitative data were used only to supplement the qualitative findings, providing additional insight rather than serving as the primary evidence. These limitations are acknowledged to ensure transparency and caution in interpreting the quantitative results, which should not be generalised beyond the sample. This clarification supports the study's rigour by defining the appropriate scope and role of the quantitative analysis.

1.7.3 Limited Scope of Data Collection

This study employs a multifaceted approach to explore the beliefs and practices of untrained Orang Asli preschool teachers in teaching English, utilising teacher interviews, questionnaires, and classroom observations. While this triangulation

strengthens the study design, it is important to acknowledge the limitations associated with each data collection method. Teacher interviews and questionnaires offer valuable insights into the teachers' self-reported beliefs and knowledge. However, these may not always reflect their actual classroom practices, which can be influenced by various factors in the moment, such as student engagement, resource constraints, or unforeseen circumstances. Classroom observations, while providing a window into real-world teaching, might be limited in scope due to the brevity of the observation period and may not capture the full range of teaching strategies employed by the teachers across different contexts.

1.7.4 Lack of Longitudinal Data

This study employs a cross-sectional design, capturing a snapshot of the teachers' beliefs and practices at a single point in time. While this approach provides valuable insights into the current state of English language teaching in this context, it does not capture the potential for change and development over time. A longitudinal study that tracks the development of these beliefs and practices over time could provide valuable insights into how teachers' approaches evolve in response to various influences. Understanding how teachers' beliefs and practices change over time can inform the design of more effective and sustainable interventions to support untrained teachers in their ongoing professional development.

1.7.5 Pilot Study Sample Specificity

The pilot study involved only one untrained Orang Asli preschool teacher from a single Orang Asli preschool in Rompin, Pahang, supervised by NGO X. This sole participant was used to test all three research instruments. While this approach allowed