

Reaching the unreachable

Raising the education bar for rural and remote communities

The road for teachers to get to upgrade themselves academically is often arduous, but few can compare to teachers in remote areas who have to travel long distances to obtain a degree. Unlike their urban or even rural counterparts, these professionals teach in primary schools that are inaccessible by road.

One such teacher is Cikgu Joinin Jabil who serves as Senior Assistant at Sekolah Kebangsaan Magandai, Sabah. He is pursuing the Bachelor of Education (Teaching Bahasa Melayu) at the School of Education & Cognitive Science, Asia e University (AeU). The programme adopts a blended approach in which students are provided with all learning materials online and attend face-to-face tutorials once a month at a nearby learning centre during weekends.

For Joinin, aged 42, the nearest learning centre is at Kota Marudu. According to him, it depends on the season. During the dry season, he uses a motorbike which will involve crossing a river using a make-shift raft. "At certain points I have to push the motorbike because the hill slopes are too steep and the journey takes me about 4 hours", stated Joinin. Occasionally, there are 4-wheel drives plying the route but they cost as much as RM 950 per trip which is exorbitant.

During the rainy season, the motorbike path can sometimes become a river. Also the path becomes slippery and muddy which makes using the motorbike impossible. So what does this determined teacher do in his quest for learning? "I walk all the way, which takes me about 8 hours and would break my journey at various huts along the way to rest and enjoy the snacks prepared by my wife which I bring along with me", retorts Joinin rather casually. As though walking 8 hours through the forest was not gruelling enough, "quite



Joinin towing his motorbike in a make-shift raft to cross a river to continue his journey

often I come across various types of wild animals which I have to cautiously avoid. It also gets very cold trekking through the forest during the rainy season", added Joinin. In fact, several years ago, Joinin was the victim of a poisonous snakebite which left him hospitalised for several weeks.

At the Kota Marudu learning centre, Joinin attends classes, downloads learning materials, watches video clips, uploads assignments, surfs the web and discusses online with course-mates. "The learning device provided by AeU and the adoption of the blended learning approach is most appropriate for me, who has to work, study, attend to family matters and travel long hours to discuss with my tutors and fellow students. "Often at times I feel

like giving up, but the comprehensive learning materials, the facilities provided and the support of tutors has greatly spurred me to persevere despite the odds", says Joinin.

Currently in the final stages of his programme, Joinin is excited about the prospect of graduating in 2016. Based on his CGPA thus far, he is among the top 10% in an enrolment of 900 students pursuing the bachelors programme. He attributes his success to his tutors and the support of his wife and four children. His wife is a teacher in the same school and his children attend the same school. "It is a mammoth task having to balance work, study and family; and manage time most effectively and efficiently", says Joinin.