

# Against all odds

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 Sekolah Kebangsaan Magandai, Sabah senior assistant. 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 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 makeshift raft.

"At certain points I have to push the motorbike because the hill slopes are too steep and the journey takes me about four hours," said Joinin.

Occasionally, there are four-wheel drives plying the route but they cost as much as RM950 per trip, which is exorbitant.

becomes slippery and muddy, which make 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 eight hours and would break my journey at various huts along the way to rest and enjoy the snacks prepared by my wife," he said.

As though walking eight hours through the forest was not grueling enough, he added, "Quite 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."

Several years ago, Joinin was the victim of a poisonous snake bite, 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 - I have to work, study, attend to family matters and travel long hours to discuss with my tutors and fellow students. At times I feel like giving up but the comprehensive learning materials, facilities provided and support of tutors have greatly spurred

programme, Joinin is excited about the prospect of graduating next year.

Based on his CGPA so 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 to manage time effectively and efficiently," said Joinin.

■ For details on AeU, look out for the advertisement in this *StarSpecial*.



Joinin riding along a muddy road.