

Reaching the unreachable

> Asia e University raises the education bar for rural and remote communities

THE road for teachers 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 Joinin Jabil who serves as senior assistant at Sekolah Kebangsaan Magandai, Sabah.

He is pursuing a Bachelor of Education (Teaching Bahasa Melayu) at Asia e University's (AeU) School of Education & Cognitive Science. The programme adopts a blended approach in which students are provided with all the learning materials online and attend face-to-face tutorials once a month at a nearby learning centre during weekends.

For Joinin, 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 involves crossing a river using a make-shift raft.

"The journey takes me about



four hours and at certain points I have to push the motorbike because the hill slopes are too steep," he said.

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

During the rainy season, the motorbike path becomes slippery and muddy, and sometimes it becomes a river making the use of the motorbike impossible. So how does this determined teacher travel in his quest for learning?



(above) Joinin pushing his motorbike uphill.

(right) Joinin, AeU's Bachelor of Education student.

(left) Joinin towing his motorbike in a make-shift raft to cross a river to AeU's learning centre.



In fact, 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 material, watches video clips, uploads assignments, surfs the web, and discusses online with coursemates.

"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 have greatly spurred me to persevere despite the odds," he said.

Currently in the final stage of his programme, Joinin is excited about the prospect of graduating next year. Based on his CGPA thus far, he is among the top 10% 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 also attend the same school.

"It is a mammoth task having to balance work, study and family; and managing time effectively and efficiently," Joinin said. — Yee Jie Min