

FOCUS

Sunday mail
29/11/2015
MIS 6



Orang Asli children using laptops in school. The writer says the younger generation is increasingly exposed to gathering information online. — Picture by Bernama

Orang Asli lagging in ICT literacy

their daily lives.

The two-year research funded by UPM began in 2012. Project leader Assoc Prof Dr Sarjit S. Gill focused the study on six ethnic minorities, namely the Siamese, Sikh, Baba Nyonya, Chetti, Portuguese and Orang Asli in Malacca and Selangor.

He said the government needed to carry out more efforts to increase ICT usage among target groups, especially in extending wider Internet coverage.

“Not many people are interested in doing research on ICT among minority groups. The purpose of this study is to see how ethnic minorities can use ICT to promote and preserve their ethnic culture and identity,” Sarjit said.

There are differing views on the growth of ICT today, with some saying it may become an agent that erodes cultural values that in turn complicates efforts to establish a true ethnic identity.

However, the same study found ICT can also be used to maintain the identity and culture of ethnic minorities, especially in building their ethnic character.

A total of 400 respondents aged between 13 and 74 took part in the study, with the highest participation from the Sikhs (32 per cent) followed by Orang Asli (23 per cent), Baba Nyonya (13 per cent), Siamese (12 per cent) as well as the Chetti and Portuguese (10 per cent each).

Out of the total, 74 per cent said they owned a computer, laptop or tablet while 26 per cent did not due to financial constraints.

However, 98 per cent of the respondents owned a mobile phone, which indicated a higher use of this communication device

compared to computers, laptops or tablets, he said.

The Siamese ranked the highest in using ICT to promote and preserve their culture (85.4 per cent), followed by the Sikhs (63.3 per cent), Chetti (60 per cent), Portuguese (47 per cent), Baba Nyonya (42.3 per cent) and Orang Asli (20.7 per cent).

“The Orang Asli utilised less ICT due to low Internet accessibility in their remote settlements compared with other ethnicity.

“They not only need to be given equal opportunities in terms of facilities like broadband, but they also need knowledge on the importance of ICT in preserving their identity and culture,” said Sarjit.

The Orang Asli community were receptive towards development, especially ICT, but poverty, limited education and ICT facilities in their rural villages made many ICT-illiterate.

The study on the Orang Asli village in Pulau Carey revealed the community, especially its youths, were interested in ICT and often spent time in cyber cafes to seek information and entertainment through ICT.

“They (Orang Asli) need infrastructure and info-structure. The Education Ministry needs to ensure that Orang Asli schools are equipped with better ICT facilities and that they are more conducive to use,” he said.

Sarjit, who is also National Professors Council National Unity Cluster secretary, said the research in general showed ethnic minorities were sure ICT played an important role in sustaining their cultural identity.

They also found it easy to adapt to ICT innovations to bring their culture forward.

These ethnic minority groups need the

attention of various parties, especially the government, in efforts to improve ICT facilities and development, so they can also help develop and enjoy part of the country's economy, said Sarjit, who plans to extend his research to the indigenous communities in Sabah and Sarawak.

The use of social media such as Facebook could be utilised to highlight issues regarding the Orang Asli and their culture, like how the Centre for Orang Asli Concerns had used Facebook and created a website to bring up community issues.

The Indigenous Peoples Network of Malaysia has created an open page for the public while the Peninsular Malaysia Orang Asli Villages Network created a closed group on Facebook.

“There are even open and closed groups on Facebook that use either Bahasa Malaysia or the native language of the ethnic groups to exchange views, photos and videos.”

He said volunteers such as Gerai OA were more focused on helping to document and reviving Orang Asli handicraft, where proceeds would be returned in full to the craft makers. — Bernama

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