

Career Interests of the Indigenous (Orang Asli) Students in Secondary School: An Initial Study

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Abstract

Despite numerous initiatives, assistance, and allocations provided by the government to the indigenous – also known as Orang Asli – community, the number of Orang Asli individuals in public higher education institutions remains relatively small compared to other ethnic groups, and similarly in the employment sector. This study is important for raising awareness about the career interests of Orang Asli students based on their personalities. This research is a quantitative survey study using a survey questionnaire conducted at Sekolah Menengah Agama (SMA) Orang Asli, Sungai Siput, Perak. The sample comprises Form 4 and Form 5 students, including 23 female students and 17 male students. These students were selected through purposive sampling, focusing on the age group closest to transitioning to higher education and subsequently to the workforce. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics to identify career preferences based on the RIASEC Holland personality types. According to the study, the Artistic (A) personality type is predominant and significant among Orang Asli students. Therefore, by identifying the types of personalities among students, teachers can better maintain students' attention and involvement in the learning process. Thus, exposure to career interests should be introduced at an early age and nurtured so that the Orang Asli community does not fall behind and can compete effectively with other communities in the country.

Keywords: Career Interests, Holland Theory, Indigenous Students, Secondary School, Malaysia.

Introduction

Although Malaysia has achieved over 60 years of independence, the number of Orang Asli people still remains small in public higher education institutions compared to other ethnic groups, which hundreds of thousands. The lack of exposure and achievement in education also affects the rate of Orang Asli entering the workforce. Parents within the Orang Asli community, in particular, are often unaware of the importance of education in improving their own and their children's lives. Sawalludin et al (2020), state that education is a crucial component in determining a person's quality of life. Education can also serve as a stepping

stone to achieving desired employment (Mohd Nor, Sukimi, Mohd Nor, 2018; Samian & Awang, 2017). There are four elements of quality of life that are criteria for the quality of life within the Orang Asli community: i) education; ii) socio-economics; iii) health; and iv) infrastructure and basic utilities (Yew, Md Ramlan & Ahmad, 2019).

The Department of Orang Asli Development (JAKOA) is one of the organizations responsible for protecting the Orang Asli and their way of life from rapid development and exploitation by outsiders, as well as providing facilities and assistance in health, education, and socio-economic development. Despite being a minority group in Malaysia, the Orang Asli have not been neglected by the Malaysian government. The 2024 budget presented by the Prime Minister of Malaysia allocated 333 million for the management, human capital development, education, entrepreneurship, and implementation of economic development and infrastructure projects for the Orang Asli community. This aligns with the government's intention to ensure the well-being of all citizens without leaving anyone behind.

Awang et al (2022), describe the learning culture of the Orang Asli as practical and relevant to their way of life. It is natural for the Orang Asli to rely on natural resources for their livelihood and leisure time (Sulaiman et al., 2020). Through JAKOA, the welfare of Orang Asli in education has not been neglected, as JAKOA has provided assistance to those who are eligible and in need. Orang Asli students are more interested in learning sessions that involve more engaging activities that require physical movement rather than abstract thinking, which in return influenced their career choices after school (Aini, Don & Abdullah, 2023).

Research Background

There are six personality types established by Holland (1985) to be matched with similar six dimensions of career as follow:

- a. **Realistic (R)** – this category describes individuals with practical skills who are associated with the use of objects, tools, and machinery. Careers suited to Realistic individuals often involve fields such as agriculture, manufacturing, repair, and similar areas. Individuals in this category typically prefer working alone, allowing them to express their inherent characteristics.
- b. **Investigative (I)** – this dimension describes the core principles of the investigative personality by categorizing individuals in this group as having high analytical skills, a deep curiosity, complexity, and rational thinking. They are also characterized by their interest in observation, research, analysis, evaluation, and problem-solving.
- c. **Artistic (A)** – artistic individuals are creative, imaginative, and innovative. They prefer freedom and are resistant to engaging in overly systematic activities. Careers that reflect the Artistic personality include roles such as photographers, dancers, painters, and so on.
- d. **Social (S)** – the social personality type is geared towards individuals who have the ability to influence others with traits such as discussion, helping others, cooperation, and resolving conflicts. Social individuals contrast with Realistic individuals in that they are more inclined towards human interactions and are less interested in systematic activities involving objects.

- e. **Enterprising (E)** – enterprising individuals are those who enjoy working and interacting with people. They tend to exhibit traits such as leadership, directing, and persuading others. These individuals often influence others to achieve economic benefits and interests.
- f. **Conventional (C)** – conventional individuals are associated with routine, systematic activities, and working independently while adhering to rules. They avoid engaging in unclear activities, procedures, and explorations. Careers suited to conventional individuals include roles such as bank officers, document clerks, and financial analysts.

Therefore, this study aims to identify students' career interests of Orang Asli students, based on the these RIASEC Holland personality codes. The objectives of this study are as follow:

- a. to identify the career interests of Orang Asli students based on the RIASEC Holland personality types
- b. to determine the three most significant personality codes among Orang Asli students

Methodology

This quantitative study utilizes the survey design, whereby the Self-Directed Search (SDS) questionnaire was administered at the Sekolah Menengah Agama (SMA) Orang Asli, Sungai Siput, Perak. The purpose of the study is to identify the career interests of students based on the RIASEC Holland personality types. The sample consists of Form 4 and Form 5 students, consist of 23 female students and 17 male students. These students were selected through purposive sampling, as Form 4 and Form 5 are the ages closest to transitioning to higher education and subsequently to the workforce.

The SDS career interest questionnaire used was developed by John L. Holland and adapted by Sidek Mohd Noah. The instrument has two parts: the first part addresses student demographics, while the second part focuses on career interests, consisting of 150 items categorized according to the six personality components: Realistic (R), Investigative (I), Artistic (A), Social (S), Enterprising (E), and Conventional (C).

Data analysis is performed using descriptive statistics to identify the career preferences of Orang Asli students based on Holland's personality codes and to determine the three most significant personality codes among the Orang Asli. The analysis is conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Version 23.0.

Results

The Self-Directed Search (SDS) career interest questionnaire by Holland is divided into two main sections: Section A: Demographics, and Section B: Career Interests. Section A provides demographic information including gender and grade level. Table 1 displays the findings from the descriptive analysis using frequency (f) and percentage (%). Table 1 depicts that the study involved 40 respondents, consisting of 17 male students (42.5%) and 23 female students (57.5%). The students participating in this study were from Form 4 (57.5%) and Form 5 (42.5%).

Table 1

Demographic profile of respondents

	Category	Frequency (f)	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	17	42.5
	Female	23	57.5
Form	Four (4)	23	57.5
	Five (5)	17	42.50

Table 2 shows the mean scores for the Holland RIASEC personality test components from the 40 study samples. The Artistic code leads with the highest mean score (9.50), indicating that Orang Asli students are more inclined towards fields related to the arts, such as music, literature, drama, and creative activities related to nature. The second highest code is Social, with an average score of (9.28). Generally, individuals in this category exhibit traits such as a preference for teamwork, helping others, and strong communication skills. Next, the Conventional code ranks third with a mean score of (8.55). Individuals in this category are more organized, avoid unclear tasks, and adhere to norms. The fourth is the Realistic code with an average score of (8.43), which is only 0.12 points lower than the Conventional code. Realistic individuals tend to use objects, tools, and machines and are often involved in careers related to agriculture and technical fields. Investigative is the second lowest, with a mean score of (7.58). This code describes individuals who rely heavily on thinking skills to solve problems. This finding aligns with Sulaiman et al. (2020), which noted that Orang Asli students are less interested in learning that involves thinking skills and prefer approaches that involve more physical activity. Lastly, Enterprising has the lowest mean score (6.53) and is the least common personality code among Orang Asli students. Enterprising involves skills in influencing others to gain benefits and interests, with careers in this code being more business-oriented.

Table 2

Average scores for the RIASEC types

Type	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)
Realistic (R)	8.43	4.361
Investigative (I)	7.58	5.272
Artistic (A)	9.50	4.878
Social (S)	9.28	5.588
Enterprising (E)	6.53	4.224
Conventional (C)	8.55	4.857

Tables 3, 4, and 5 show the three dominant personality codes among Orang Asli students. The first significant code is Artistic (A) with a frequency value of 16. The second dominant code, with equal values, are Conventional (11) and Social (11). The third dominant code is Investigative, with a value of 9. This finding contrasts with the previous overall mean score where Investigative ranked fifth among the personality test components related to career interests.

Table 3

The most dominant personality code

Code	Frequency (<i>f</i>)	Percent (%)
Realistic (R)	11	27.5
Investigative (I)	4	10
Artistic (A)	16	40
Social (S)	5	12.5
Enterprising (E)	-	-
Conventional (C)	4	10

Table 4

The second dominant personality code

Code	Frequency (<i>f</i>)	Percent (%)
Realistic (R)	3	7.5
Investigative (I)	6	15
Artistic (A)	6	15
Social (S)	11	27.5
Enterprising (E)	3	7.5
Conventional (C)	11	27.5

Table 5

The third dominant personality code

Code	Frequency (<i>f</i>)	Percent (%)
Realistic (R)	6	15
Investigative (I)	9	22.5
Artistic (A)	8	20
Social (S)	8	20
Enterprising (E)	3	7.5
Conventional (C)	6	15

Discussion

This study aims to identify the career interests of Orang Asli students based on the RIASEC Holland personality types and to determine the three dominant personality codes among Orang Asli students. The findings from this study can be used as the first step in raising awareness among Orang Asli students about potential career paths that align with their personalities. Vocational and Technical Education and Training (TVET) is a branch of education relevant to all students, including the Orang Asli. The lack of exposure to TVET has resulted in low participation of the Orang Asli community in training and employment sectors (Abdul Wahab, Jaafar & Sunarti, 2020).

According to the study, the Artistic (A) personality type is predominant and significant among Orang Asli students. It is a teacher's aspiration to have students who actively engage and participate in every activity conducted. Therefore, by identifying the types of personalities among students, a teacher can better maintain students' attention and

involvement in the learning process. Many Orang Asli face significant challenges within most educational systems because they need to adapt from their traditional lifestyles to achieve academic goals (Sulaiman et al., 2020). Hence, this study is important for schools, teachers, and the community to increase awareness about the career interests of Orang Asli students.

The limitation of this study is that it focuses only on students from the selected location and cannot be generalized to all Orang Asli students. The sample size of 40 students from the Sekolah Menengah Agama (SMA) Orang Asli Sungai Siput, Perak is too small to generalize the findings of this study. Nevertheless, as an initial study, it is deemed sufficient to establish the baseline data to be expanded to the larger population of Orang Asli in the future.

Conclusion

In a nutshell, education is a key factor in enhancing the quality and economy of a society and is crucial for economic development by producing a skilled workforce. The limited involvement of the Orang Asli in the employment sector is a significant concern for many parties. Economic activities traditionally passed down by the Orang Asli, such as hunting, gathering forest products, and small-scale farming, remain central to their daily lives. However, with the advancement of the nation, these activities may become less relevant for the Orang Asli to sustain their livelihoods. Therefore, career interest exposure should be introduced at an early age and nurtured to ensure that the Orang Asli community does not fall behind and can compete effectively with other communities in the country.

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