

# An Alternative Education Centre for Teaching Staff in the Continuity of Education among the Rohingya Community in Malaysia

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This article explains the role and participation of the teaching staff from alternative education centres in Malaysia. Statistics record the ever-increasing number of Rohingya Muslims in Malaysia. Thus, non-governmental organisations (NGO) have taken the initiative to establish alternative education centres, appointing volunteers as teaching staff. Studies found the NGO-appointed teaching staff play a comprehensive role in developing human capital among the risk community <sup>1</sup>, such as the Rohingya Muslims, who have been in Malaysia since 1995. Four categories of NGOs with different backgrounds worked to rescue this risk community with the help of volunteer teaching staff. The teaching staff have introduced several variations and approaches to establish alternative education centres, and these variations are explored for the first time in this article. Based on this research, alternative methods and continuity is necessary to prevent education dropouts, in line with the moral development of a civilised society. The teaching staff are a key driving element to the importance of education focussed on the Rohingya Muslims. This article concludes that education scholars and policy makers must formulate education methods and variations according to academic and practical results.

**Keywords:** *Alternative education, Volunteer teaching staff, NGO-established education.*

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<sup>1</sup> In a state of a protracted humanitarian crisis, vulnerable to abuse and exploitation by smugglers.

## INTRODUCTION

The volunteer teaching staff in alternative education centres provide academic modules that are intended to empower Rohingya children in writing, reading, and arithmetic. With the ability to read, write, and count, the Rohingya can build up their skills with knowledge, physical and mental health, good character, independence, and awareness of their own strengths and weaknesses. The ability to read, write, and count are requirements for learning, thus producing the proper attitude to transform positively in all aspects of life (Al-Qaraḍāwī, Yusuf, 2012:111). In building basic human capital with writing, reading, and arithmetic skills, it would lead to students learning and developing their character with good morals and a drive for lifelong learning. The process of character building through these three key skills benefits the human civilisation (Muhammad Abd. Rauf, 1991: 25). The three skills create an opportunity for growing self-potential based upon education to create conditions for learning and studying, whereby active education leads to self-potential development, spiritual strength, religiosity, identification of goals in life, good character, intelligence, good morals, and the necessary skills for the development of the self, the nation, and the country (John Bowker, 1995:9). This suggestion is also mentioned in the National Education Philosophy of Malaysia (2009):

“Education in Malaysia is based on academic emphasis, understanding of Islam, and the necessity of global development. The national education system sets up an integrated education policy to achieve the national education goal. Educated students as members of society work to grow their self-potential through planned learning. Therefore, the education policy is key to developing a nation and country”.

Educators, as teaching staff, play an important role in education development to determine the efficacy of the national education planning (Muhammad Abd. Rauf, 1991:58).

## THE EARLY HISTORY OF THE ROHINGYA PEOPLES IN MYANMAR-MALAYSIA

The nineteen-eighties saw the beginning of Rohingya migration to Malaysia after the passing of the Citizenship Law 1982, in which the Rohingya are not recognised as one of the 135 ethnic groups of Myanmar.

According Article Pyithu Hluttaw Law No 4 (1982). furthermore in the Burma Citizenship Law state (1),

Clause (4) The Council of State may decide whether any ethnic group is national or not.

According to the Burma Citizenship Law *Pyithu Hluttaw* Law No 4, 1982 (2),

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The provision in Chapter II of the law, clause (3) states, Nationals such as the Kachin, Kayah, Karen, Chin, Burman, Mon, Rakhine or Shan and ethnic groups as have settled in any of the territories included within the State as their permanent home from a period anterior to 1185 B.E., 1823 A.D. are Burma citizens.

Based on the Myanmar Citizenship Law of 1982, the Rohingya are not citizens in the Rakhine State of Myanmar. As a result, the Rohingya have no documents of citizenship, affecting the education opportunities of their next generation. Rohingya children are not allowed to receive education in government schools. As a result, they cannot read, write or count. The Rohingya have no formal qualification certificate that would allow them to work in the government sector. Health-wise, the Rohingya are also not allowed to receive treatment in government hospitals due to a lack of citizenship papers. This situation affects the future of the Rohingya peoples in the Arakan Province (Intan Suria Hamzah, Sity Daud, Nor Azizan Idris, 2016).

Established education centres formulate their own education syllabus, mostly without oversight and standard development, affecting the education quality of generations of Rohingya people. The construction of an effective syllabus is important for education centres, as the syllabus serves as input for studying during the learning period.

In addition, Myanmar imposes continued economic sanctions, leading to starvation and disease. The pressure faced by the Rohingya due to economic sanctions and a lack of access to basic necessities, such as rice and other materials, force them to eat rationed rice and grass to survive (Siti Khalijah & Mohd Nasran 2016). Amidst the cholera epidemic <sup>2</sup>, the Myanmar Government has introduced no initiatives or prevention measures for infectious diseases, leading to an outbreak, and thus increasing the risk of death and suffering.

Overt policy and legal discrimination towards the Rohingya expose them to human rights abuses by both government, and non-governmental organisations. This includes systematic planned restrictions on Rohingya people's freedom of movement, restrictions to marriage, birth, and population. In addition, these restrictions limit the Rohingya people's access to health, education, livelihood, and family life. These policies, in the mind of the Myanmar people, equate the Rohingya to foreigners and encourage discrimination towards them. This then leads to the erasure of the Rohingya identity, ethnic hatred, and encouragement of violence towards this community (Intan Suria Hamzah, Sity Daud, Nor Azizan Idris, 2016).

According to records, annually over 200,000 Rohingya people flee their homeland to other parts of the world. From this number, 38 per cent are adult males (76,000), while 31 per cent

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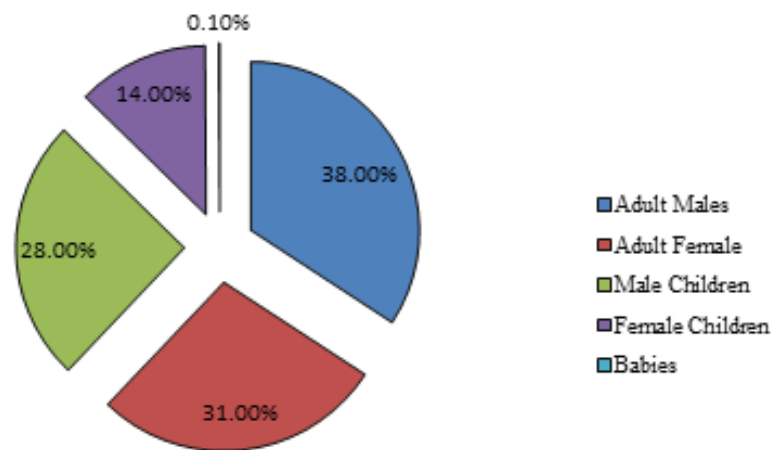
<sup>2</sup> Cholera is an extremely virulent disease that can cause severe acute watery diarrhea. It takes between 12 hours and five days for a person to show symptoms after ingesting contaminated food or water.

are adult females (62,000), 28 per cent are male children (56,000), 14 per cent are female children (28,000), and 0.1 per cent are babies (200).

The table below depicts the percentage of Rohingya refugees fleeing Myanmar annually. The total migrating population mostly settle in Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia.

**Figure 1.** Total Annual Recorded Rohingya Refugees Worldwide

### Total Annual Rohingya Refugees Worldwide



Source: UNHCR Centre, 2017

In 2012, from the 200,000 Rohingya refugees, around 1,500 became victims of human trafficking, while 150 were reported to have died in the process of migrating to their destination. Due to wars and threats of genocide, the Rohingya left their homeland and undertook the risks of crossing the seas on boats towards destinations that do not recognise the Rohingya people. However, when the Rohingya arrive, they are treated as illegal migrants in host countries (Rohingya Society of Malaysia, 2015).

Since nineteen ninety, the Rohingya migrated to Malaysia to seek protection. Malaysia is not a party to the Geneva Refugee Convention of 1951 or the New York Protocol in 1967. Therefore, under the Immigration Act Malaysia 1959/63 (Act 155), refugees and asylum seekers are considered illegal migrants and are subject to arrests, detention, and punishment, including whipping and banishment (Suhakam, 2015). The life of a refugee and asylum seeker in Malaysia is lacking and difficult. They cannot legally work in Malaysia, and the children of refugees are denied education. For asylum seekers, treatment in government hospitals is prohibited, while private clinics are prohibitive.

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNCHR), an estimated 150,000 Rohingya refugees now live in Malaysia. However, only 54,856 are registered with the UNCHR:

Total of ethnic Rohingya refugees in Malaysia: -Unregistered with UNCHR: 95,144 -Registered with UNCHR: 54,856 (UNHCR, 2017)
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## HISTORY OF ROHINGYA EDUCATION IN MYANMAR

Among the studies related to ethnic Rohingya education, includes the work of Hayden and Martin (2013), titled *Recovery Of the Education System in Myanmar*, which covers the transformation of Myanmar rule, from military junta to partial civil government. According to Hayden and Martin, a change in education from military rule has not occurred fully, due to the large and long 50-year impact of military influence, making Myanmar one of the poorest countries in the world. Education-wise, the author states the Myanmar system is still lagging, and requires rehabilitation following war and dictatorship. In addition, this journal also argues that the education in Myanmar is not as good as its neighbouring countries, and in all aspects with the Myanmar population. A basic education shows a large population of Myanmar children and adolescents do not receive education due to the still partial civil government.

However, according to South and Lall (2016), in their work titled *Schooling and Conflict: Ethnic Education and Mother Tongue-based Teaching in Myanmar*, mother-tongue-based education (MTB) occurs in non-government state schools in Myanmar, covering the languages in the classroom, and the relationship between the various types of schools in Myanmar, especially in schools run by the government and armed ethnic groups in the peace process. The effort to recognise MTB education is beneficial to early childhood, pre-school, and kindergarten programmes. The report from this study exposes the situation in Kachin, the Mon States, Karen (Kayin), and other areas to provide a deeper understanding of certain communities. The findings in this study show the Kachin and Mon ethnic groups accept the MTB education policy and agree to a ceasefire with the Government. This study shows that MTB education is demanded by certain movements to allow for ceasefire and peace.

The studies here show a contradictory picture of the education situation in Myanmar, with Hayden and Martin (2013) arguing the total education system in Myanmar remains in a recovery process, while South and Lall (2016) argue for the presence of private and

government education systems, with the Kachin, Mon States, and Karen (Kayin) groups demanding MTB education in their areas. Hayden and Martin (2013) cover the general question regarding the entire education system in Myanmar, which covers certain places in the country. The reality is, the question upon education is to provide balanced education, from pre-school to higher education, to balance knowledge and morals through private or government-run institutions (Education Planning and Research Division, 2017).

In line with the analysis on certain conflicts towards Muslim Myanmarese education, Nurul Islam (2006) states in the article, *Facts About the Rohingya Muslims Of Arakan*, that Muslim students in Burmese schools have been indoctrinated with anti-Islamic teachings. Muslim culture is often depicted in inhuman, insulting, degrading, and historically confusing ways. Due to poverty, serious discrimination, and continued oppression, the number of Rohingya students has drastically reduced. It is a challenge for Rohingya students to register at colleges and universities for higher education, as skills courses could not be properly followed due to a lack of citizenship documents. Even the handful of volunteer religious schools that educate hundreds of Rohingya students have been restricted with a lack of funding. The simplicity of traditional education institutions leads to the failure of the teaching method in producing skilled students and a qualified workforce for their community. Most ethnic Rohingya who live as refugees do not have sufficient facilities to educate their children to become contributing members of their society.

The provided education contains many learning methods and syllabus, as the alternative for Rohingya Muslim refugees in Malaysia. As Malaysia is yet to recognise refugees, they are not allowed to go to government schools, while private schools are beyond their means. Therefore, human rights bodies, non-governmental organisations, and ethnic Rohingya groups have established their respective education centres as an alternative for developing a generation of ethnic Rohingya human capital before they return to their homeland when the crisis ends or are sent to third world countries.

**Table 1:** Teaching Staff in the Continuity of Education among the Rohingya Community in Malaysia.

<b>Participating Bodies</b>	<b>Principles and Goals of Specific Organisations towards Alternative Education</b>	<b>Name of Education Centres</b>	<b>Goal of Education</b>
<i>Human Rights</i>		<i>Human Rights</i>	
a) Malaysian Relief Agency (MRA)	Organisations that look after the basic human rights, set up	a) Rohingya Education Centre (REC) Penang	A comprehensive education centre emphasising both

<p>b) Future Global Network (FGN)</p>	<p>by the Malay-Muslim community with funding from the Government of Malaysia.</p>	<p>b) REC Klang c) REC Kuantan d) Rohingya Community School, Malaysian Relief Agency (MRA)</p>	<p>academic and <i>fardhu Ain</i><sup>3</sup>. Receives religious education aid from the Penang State Islamic Religious Council, Malaysian Islamic Youth Movement (ABIM) and Wadah Percerdasan Umat Malaysia (WADAH).</p>
<p><b>Islamic based</b></p>		<p><b>Islamic based</b></p>	
<p>a) Religious Council, b) Malaysian Islamic Youth Movement (ABIM) c) Wadah Percerdasan Umat Malaysia (WADAH) d) Malaysian Consultative Council for Islamic Organization (MAPIM) e) Pertubuhan Himpunan Lepasani Institusi Pendidikan Malaysia (HALUAN) f) Malaysian Muslim Solidarity (ISMA) g) Pertubuhan Kebajikan Islam</p>	<p>Humanity is a coalition of non-governmental organisations (NGO) based on Islamic values and combined under one banner to collectively address the crisis of oppression towards the Muslim community. These NGOs have their own history and strengths to strengthen the voice of the coalition.</p>	<p>a) Knowledge Garden Learning Centre b) Rohingya Community School, Johor c) Rohingya Rainbow of Love (<i>Pelangi Kasih</i>) School, Selayang d) REC Kedah e) Bayytul Rahmah Rohingya Learning Centre, Alor Setar f) Islamic Primary School in Klang, Malaysia g) Rohingya Integrated School of Excellence (RISE)</p>	<p>Education with a goal towards literacy, developing character, and life skills. The aspiration of these schools is to provide better education for Rohingya children who are lacking in spiritual knowledge, to ensure their futures are not hindered by the past. The creativity of cooperation between NGOs builds a sense of identity and confidence through implementing education and <i>fardhu ain</i>.</p>

<sup>3</sup> Fardhu Ain refers to obligatory acts that must be performed by each individual Muslim, including prayer, charity, fasting, and pilgrimage.

<p>Malaysia (PERKIM)</p> <p>h) Malaysia Chinese Muslim Association (MACMA)</p> <p>i) Lembaga Kebajikan Perempuan Islam Malaysia (LPKIM)</p>			
<b><i>Non-Islamic based</i></b>		<b><i>Non-Islamic based</i></b>	
<p>a) Yayasan Chow Kit (YCK)</p> <p>b) St Barnabas</p> <p>c) Life Bridge</p> <p>d) Humana-PeopleTo People</p>	<p>NGO and foundations receiving funding from charities, houses of worship, corporations, government bodies, welfare centres, and individual contributions. YCK was established by Malaysians on humanitarian basis, while St Barnabas is a church providing welfare centres for refugees.</p>	<p>a) St. Barnabas Church Education Centre, Klang</p> <p>b) Chow Kit Home Schooling Foundation</p> <p>c) Life Bridge Learning Centre</p> <p>d) Humana Child Aid Society Sabah</p>	<p>The St Barnabas education centre has a Christian-based education objective, with the motto ‘Always Trust in God’. (<i>Sentiasa Percaya kepada Tuhan</i>). The YCK home schooling also introduces better non-religious-based opportunities, while other education centres rescue children from immoral activities.</p>
<b><i>Rohingya Organisations</i></b>		<b><i>Rohingya Organisations</i></b>	
<p>a) Majlis Ulama’ Rohingya (MUR)</p> <p>b) Rohingya Society Of Malaysia (RSM)</p>	<p>These community organisations are initiatives of ethnic Rohingya refugees to establish bodies that represent their voices in Malaysia. These organisations are</p>	<p>a) Madrasah Hashimiah.</p> <p>b) Madrasah Rahmaniayah <i>Persatuan Ibu Bapa Rohingya</i> [Rohingya Parents’ Association] (PIBR)</p>	<p>Education centres set up by Rohingya associations in Malaysia with aid from local associations and residents. These education centres</p>



	comprised of and are led by ethnic Rohingya who were educated in Malaysia.	c) Madrasah Rohingya Al-Nur, Sg. Sekamat Kajang. d) Madrasah Rohingya Seremban	only offer <i>fardhu ain</i> <sup>4</sup> , Qur'an education, and Islamic religious learning.
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### ***Teaching Staff Field Expertise***

A study on the method of education and spiritual realisation through alternative education centres is required, as this realisation leads to the effectiveness of the applied education method. The teaching staff function as facilitators, realising the importance of spiritual development among their students through respect, opening of the mind, individual rights, moral improvement, and honesty. The teaching staff provide the process towards spiritual awakening, and students feel motivated as a result:

“The learning here (Chow Kit Foundation Homeschooling) was built with the contributions of volunteer teaching staff with training and qualifications in counselling, teaching, and education to ensure learning effectively encourage[s] the realisation of a Muslim identity” — Respondent 1.

“We taught what we learned...we have also seen people here, how they learn, and we follow them...so I explain to my people to teach them here like they do back there (Arakan)... Just improve on them like the learning here” — Respondent 5.

### ***Combining Traditional and Modern Learning Methods***

In line with Islamic demands, the education materials are not against societal norms, with traits relevant to the education curriculum, they are suitable and flexible with the education pedagogic method and provide the latest information on different and various situations. In addition, the effectiveness of the education materials should be suitable with the students on whom they are applied, so the materials maintain their flexibility for a long time. The materials used must be suited to classroom facilities to measure education material efficiency. The materials must also provide accurate information for students, such as newspapers, posters, recordings, television or radio channels, and so on. Information accuracy must also be considered by using colour and size. For example, green for leaves, blue for the sky, etc.

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<sup>4</sup> Fardhu Ain refers to obligatory acts that must be performed by each individual Muslim, including prayer, charity, fasting, and pilgrimage

The teaching staff must also ensure that the distributed materials are safe for use in and out of the classroom, and from one group to another (Sabri Ahmad, 2003: 107):

“Learning could improve Rohingya students’ morals and beliefs, they understand learning is to bring humility when receiving knowledge from their teachers and studying religion... our leaders follow the traditional method for Rohingya education in Arakan... Traditional learning is important” — Respondent 4.

### ***Continuation of Religious Awareness***

Students must adjust their intents and goals of studying to contribute to Islam, and each Muslim must meet the required expertise, so Muslims are less dependent on non-Muslims in certain fields. The intention and goals of learning are for Allah SWT; learning is worship and a way to be closer to Allah SWT and earn merit through the spending of effort, time, and material (Sidek Baba, 2009: 2):

“The objective of Islamic education in Malaysia through answering exercises is to provide [a] good memory in fulfilling specific needs and skills for refugee students, so they can develop within a Muslim environment. In addition, [the] efforts related to planning and responsibility to improve student development, and towards the needs of ethnic Rohingya refugee students, as [the] rights of individuals... [show] the exercises aim to balance the various lesson subjects...” — Respondent 3.

### ***Moral Development and Human Capital***

The findings of this study are not only beneficial towards alternative education, but also towards the management of public and private education, private madrasahs, and home-schools. This study shapes the implementation of addressing education and learning strategies in the twenty-first century within Islamic spiritual education. The traditional education method of ‘rote memorisation’ is no longer suitable for practice in education centres as early education. Teaching through memorisation by teaching staff at the early stage must be achieved through building teaching staff perception with Rohingya Muslim spiritual development, covering the Rohingya Muslim awareness factors through Islamic education and moral development through spirituality:

“We must provide good atmosphere in their learning, the development process in their age group through completion of knowledge that they hold on to throughout their lives” — Respondent 2.

## DISCUSSION

The study on teaching staff field expertise discusses the contributions of volunteer teaching staff with suitable training and qualifications in counselling, teaching, and education to ensure learning leads to an effective awareness of the Muslim identity. Teaching staff expertise is measured through the education research method via spiritual awareness in alternative education centres that are organised by various parties. The need for spiritual awareness is to measure its effectiveness towards the education module. The function of the teaching staff is as facilitators to raise awareness on the importance of spiritual development through respect, opening of the mind, individual rights, moral improvement, and honesty. Therefore, the teaching staff expertise influences the education module towards the process of spiritual awareness and student motivation. Education centres have formulated their own education syllabus, and most have no oversight and standard development on basic syllabus construction, as well as the effects of education on the next generation of the ethnic Rohingya people. Here, the construction of an effective education module is important for the education system, as the education module serves as a platform towards the input in the learning process throughout the education period.

A combination of traditional and modern learning methods is aligned with Islamic demands, the education materials are not against societal norms, the traits are relevant to the education curriculum, they are suitable and flexible with the education pedagogic method and provide the latest information for various situations. Furthermore, the effectiveness of education materials can be measured if they are suitable for the students receiving the applied materials, if said materials prove flexible for a long time. The materials used are also suitable with classroom facilities to show their effectiveness. Provided education materials can offer accurate information for students, such as newspapers, posters, recordings, radio or television shows, and so on. Information accuracy is considered by using colour and size. For example, green for leaves, blue for the sky, and so on. The teaching staff ensure the materials distributed are safe for use in the classroom, and from one group to another. Volunteer teaching staff in alternative education centres cooperate to provide academic education modules for application with Rohingya students, covering the effective teaching of writing, reading, and arithmetic. With the three skills, the Rohingya can improve upon their skills with knowledge, physical and mental health, good character, independence, and responsibility for their own strengths and weaknesses.

A continuation of religious awareness through reading, writing, and arithmetic is a prerequisite of learning, producing the necessary attitude to transform growth in all aspects of life (Al-Qaraḍāwī, Yusuf, 2012:111). Therefore, students can better understand the knowledge and change their intentions and goals of learning to contribute towards Islam, learning for Allah SWT's sake, and turning learning into a form of worship and a way to be closer to Allah SWT by gaining merit for the effort, time, and property spent; this being part



of Islamic spiritual learning. Furthermore, building human capital with reading, writing, and arithmetic skills is intended so students learn to shape their self-character, with moral values and a desire for lifelong learning. The process of character and moral development benefits human civilisation, which emphasises reading, writing, and arithmetic (Muhammad Abd. Rauf, 1991: 25). The basic skills create the development of a self-potential based on education in an effort to produce a learning atmosphere and process. Thus, they are actively taught to grow their self-potential by possessing spiritual strength and religiosity, identifying their goals in life, and maintaining a good character, sharpness of mind, good behaviour, and the skills needed for the development of the self, nation, and country (John Bowker, 1995:9). This suggestion is also contained in the National Education Philosophy Malaysia (2009). Education in Malaysia is based on academic emphasis, an understanding of Islam, and meeting global development needs. The national education system applies an integrated education policy to achieve national education objectives. Educated students, as members of society, work to develop their self-potential via a planned learning process. Therefore, the education policy is important to develop the nation and country. The role of educators, as teaching staff, is significant in the development of education in determining the effectiveness of national education planning (Muhammad Abd. Rauf, 1991:58).

Moral and human capital development, based on the findings of this study, is not only beneficial to the alternative education world, but also to the management of public and private education, private madrasahs, and home-schools. This study shapes the implementation addressing education and learning strategies in the twenty-first century in Islamic and other religious spiritual education. The traditional 'rote memorisation' method is no longer suitable for practice in education centres, as early education. Teaching through memorisation by teaching staff at the early stages through awareness links between teaching staff perception with the spiritual development of Rohingya Muslims by covering Rohingya Muslim awareness factors through Islamic education and character development via spirituality. The reports record overt legal and policy discrimination against the Rohingya due to their lack of citizenship and exposes them to human rights abuses by government and non-governmental organisations in their homeland. The discrimination includes systematic sanctions on the Rohingya people's freedom of movement, and restrictions on marriage, birth rate, and population. In addition, these restrictions limit the Rohingya people's access to health, education, livelihood, and family life. These policies depict Rohingya as foreigners and further encourage discrimination. They promote to the Myanmarese that Rohingya are immigrants, which leads to the erasure of the Rohingya identity and fomenting ethnic hatred and violence directed towards this community (Intan Suria Hamzah, Sity Daud, Nor Azizan Idris, 2016). Established education centres formulate their own education syllabus, and most of them do so without oversight and standards in syllabus construction basis, with subsequent effects on the education of the next generation of ethnic Rohingya peoples. The construction of an effective syllabus is significant for an education centre, as the syllabus serves as an input in the teaching process throughout the learning period.



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## CONCLUSION

Volunteer teaching staff working on human development in the societal context require alternative education development as established by NGOs in Malaysia, proving that the development of alternative education programmes among the community, as established by NGOs, can shape energetic human capital. This is in line with the aspiration of a developed country with a national education philosophy emphasising moral development for global growth.

In ensuring the creation of a balanced society, the NGOs take a comprehensive role in establishing alternative education centres for humanitarian reasons. The NGOs collaborate to reduce public human risk that could affect public security by taking responsibility over those seen as unsavable.

The volunteer teaching staff are important in alternative education centres by sharing their skills, module development, and discipline-building. Instead of merely providing food, monetary aid, and residence, it is better to provide alternative education centres, so the recipients can be independent and look for better education opportunities based upon gained knowledge and an emerging moral awareness.

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**NOTE:** The interviews with Respondent 1 – Respondent 5 were conducted in line with their comfort and choice, either in alternative education centres set up by human rights bodies or non-governmental organisations, and *madrasahs* set up by Rohingya associations in Malaysia between 13 October 2017–21 January 2018.



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