

## SUPPORTING THE UNITED NATION'S SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON CHOW KIT ROAD MARGINALIZED GROUP MINI LIBRARY MAKEOVER

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**Abstract:** With the main objectives to reach out to the children of Chow Kit, Kuala Lumpur and help them own a convenient mini library as a place for them to read and learn, a mini library makeover project was conducted by UiTM Cawangan Pahang's Al-Bukhari Library Team. The project was also conducted to fulfil the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agenda in terms of equitable quality of education (SDG4) and reduce inequality to information which are central to an individual's independence (SDG10). Buku Jalanan Chow Kit (BJCK) and Sekolah Bimbingan Jalinan Kasih (SBJK) were selected for the project as they provided the space to learn for marginalized groups of children who do not have the privilege to attend school. This research employed qualitative methods with in-depth interviews with volunteers and teachers of these places based on how they operate the places, the benefits for the kids, volunteers and teachers and the impacts to their places after the makeover project conducted earlier. The findings concluded that to keep on attracting and sustaining the reading program for these marginalized children, the researchers could further assist the teachers and volunteers in developing a library with improved reading modules as well as the addition of ICT skills and collection management skills for these kids. Opportunity for future research involving other related SDGs agenda to these places has also been identified and expected to benefit these children more in the future.

**Keywords:** BJCK; mini library makeover; marginalized group; SBJK; SDGs

### Introduction

The United Nation 2030 Agenda through its' initiatives of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that everyone, everywhere enjoys peace and prosperity (Donaires, Cezarino, Caldana & Liboni, 2019). From promoting literacy, to offering free access to information, libraries around the world offer a wide range of products and services that promote the achievement of SDGs as championed by the UN. All libraries provide a safe space for learning and they come with indispensable support of dedicated staff with deep understanding of local needs (IFLA, 2018). In tandem with the notion, a mini library makeover project called "*Let's Read with PAB; With Knowledge We Lead*" was conducted by a team of librarians and staff from UiTM Cawangan Pahang's Al-Bukhari Library two years ago. The project which was initiated by the first author based from a paper presented earlier in IFLA World Library and Information Congress 2018 was conducted at Buku Jalanan Chow Kit (BJCK) and Sekolah Bimbingan Jalinan Kasih (SBJK). These two places were selected because they provide the space to learn for the marginalized children, who were either undocumented or homeless, as these children do not have the privilege to attend schools like other ordinary kids. The mini libraries are equipped with book collections, toys, and computers and served as informal classrooms where learning activities take place every day apart from learning to appreciate cleanliness, good health, and beauty in a carefully designed and nurturing environment. With the initial objectives to reach out to the children of Chow Kit, Kuala Lumpur and help them own a mini library as a place for them to read and learn, a series of interview was conducted with the volunteers and teachers who have been supervising these places to get the feedback on how they operate the places

after the makeovers, the benefits of the mini library to the kids, volunteers and teachers and the impacts of the makeover project to their places after two years.

## **Literature review**

### **United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**

The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development aims to end poverty, protect the environment, and ensure that everyone, everywhere, experiences peace and prosperity. The SDGs are interconnected, and often the key to achieving one involves tackling issues that are more commonly associated with another (IFLA, 2018). There are 17 goals associated with 169 targets and 232 indicators in the SDGs, which were adopted in 2015 by all United Nations member states. To achieve economic prosperity and equity for present and future generations, sustainable development is a multi-dimensional concept that encompasses many aspects of society, hence countries, international agencies and business organizations have made sustainable development a key part of their policy documents (Donaires et al., 2019). Libraries around the world offer a wide range of activities, projects, and programs that can be linked to one or more of the SDGs. Apart from being a place where people can gather and learn, libraries are also places where people can feel safe and welcome with well-trained, experienced staff available to assist in meeting the needs of the local community. Libraries promote digital inclusion, including access to ICT, internet connection, and skill to encourage innovation and creativity, as well as access to the knowledge of the world for current and future generations (IFLA, 2018).

### **Quality Education as Part of the Objective of Mini Library Makeover Project (SDG4)**

The mini library makeover project was initiated with the main objective of ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all, including the marginalized children of Chow Kit Road. Libraries are at the heart of schools, universities and colleges in every country around the world and are involved in a number of activities and projects aimed at promoting literacy and lifelong learning in the community Tbaishat (2021). Since libraries also act as facilitators in the community, setting up and giving a makeover to the mini libraries of BJCK and SBJK as local learning centers to support learning among the marginalized groups has been socially gratifying. In this new millennium, being literate is not an option anymore but a must to all, regardless of the background of a person. Being illiterate means not being able to read, to learn, to access data and to live one's life fully, therefore, the existence of a library is significant as libraries have a very strong track record of supporting literacy and encouraging a love of reading and learning (Hapel, 2020).

### **Reduced Inequalities as Part of the Objective of the Mini Library Makeover Project (SDG10)**

Reducing inequality within the society by promoting equitable access to information, freedom of expression, freedom of association and assembly, and privacy which are central to individuals' independence is another objective of the makeover project. Libraries help to reduce inequality by providing safe, civic spaces open to all, in both urban and rural areas across the world. They foster community engagement and citizen participation through local programmes and partnerships with other civil society organization and local governments. They are a lifeline to marginalized groups, who may struggle to access information, skills or support elsewhere. These SDGs objectives are supported by Tbaishat (2021) and Woodson et al (2020) who found that library offers training to staff working in the libraries, build social capital in the community and create links between people that enhance social trust. These can similarly be seen in the case of the BJCK and SBJK children who found "the recovery of hope to restore their lives, their dignity as persons, the creation of security opportunities and the return of confidence in the social environment" (Jaramillo, 2012).

### **Marginalized Groups**

Race, gender, religion, sexuality, age and socio-economic status are a few of the factors that can cause groups and communities to be marginalized. These people are often subjected to abuse and exploitation as a result of being treated as objects instead of people (Walters, Trudie, Stadler, & Jepson, 2021). As

part of this study, children from BJCK and SBJK are considered as marginalized groups. BJCK is an NGO that works to provide equal education opportunities to all the children in the Chow Kit catchment area while students of SBJK come from a variety of backgrounds, including children of social workers, parents involved in drug trafficking, criminal behavior, chaotic family problems, no permanent residence (homeless), and the poorest of the low-income. The objectives of BJCK are to provide skills-based training to further develop the children's potential, to provide a resource centre, an educational and a safe space that help to improve the underprivileged children and to increase literacy rate to 90% (Buku Jalanan Chow Kit, 2017). Meanwhile, the objectives of SBJK are to ensure that street and marginalized children have access to formal education in a conducive environment, reduce Malaysian dropout rates, provide opportunities to shape career paths for street and marginalized children, and build knowledgeable, skilled and independent human beings.

Due to their availability in both urban and rural areas around the world, libraries help reduce inequality by providing safe, civic spaces that are open to everyone (Tbaishat, 2021). However, the way in which inclusive education is implemented in different countries and contexts is vastly different, especially when it comes to marginalized students who are not disabled (Corcoran & Kaneva, 2021). This paper focuses more on the qualitative experiences of individuals and groups, and in particular, how marginalization manifests itself in the lives of children at a mini library.

## Methodology

This research employed qualitative methods of field observations and in-depth open-ended interviews with selected participants involving the founder, teachers, volunteers and government officers who helped supervise BJCK and SBJK. According to Eriksson, Boistrup & Thornberg, (2018), 'qualitative research methodology endeavours to understand the world of the participant by situating the researcher with all their values and assumptions in that world'. The method particularly suited for gaining an understanding of complex social and organizational phenomena as they produce a rich understanding of the interrelationships and intricacies of a relatively small number of people and cases and help libraries address issues that are not readily quantifiable such as efforts to build community (Williamson, K., & Johanson, 2017).

Data were collected using a semi-structured interview approach conducted by the first author in stages since August 2018 till end of December 2020 in order to observe the effectiveness of the program. In total, three interviews were conducted with each respondent, pre and post programs, with an average length of 60 minutes per session. The interviews were audio recorded, coded, transcribed, and checked to ensure accuracy. Interview transcripts were coded to look for patterns in respondents' experiences and to identify the primary issues described in the interviews. Field notes and pre-program on-site field observations at BJCK and SBJK conducted in 2018 as well as responses from casual informal conversations between the marginalized children and the teachers of BJCK and SBJK served as a source in the process of constructing interview questions. Observations of the children during reading programs at the learning centre, interactions with the teachers and the children, interaction among children and volunteers during and after program were recorded as part of the data collection method.

## Findings and Discussions

Based from the interviews conducted with five main respondents from both SBJK and BJCK as well as field observations conducted both at BJCK and SBJK, it can be concluded that the respondents have a wide range of experience in their respective fields from the beginning of the operation of the shelter and school. The teachers at BJCK were divided into two categories, full time and part time basis. Their age ranged from 25 years old to 35 years old with a bachelor degree as their minimum educational background. Meanwhile for SBJK, the teacher in charge of the Resource Center is an English Language teacher holding a Bachelor Degree of Education (TESL). The findings also show that the respondents' roles involved community outreach, teaching, managing and developing the shelter and school. For BJCK, they manage the learning centre by dividing subjects among the teachers like Japanese Language, Science, Mathematics, Geography, Bahasa Melayu and English Language classes. One specific teacher was also assigned to handle the administration and crowd fund management to sustain the BJCK operation.

The research evaluations were also based on the research questions of (1) how do these shelters and schools operate the places after their library makeovers, (2) what are the benefits for the kids, volunteers and teachers, (3) what are the impacts to their places after the “Let’s Read with PAB; with knowledge we lead” project conducted two years ago. Based from the interviews conducted with the respondents, the following responses were received, recorded and concluded.

### **RQ 1: How BJCK and SBJK operate the places after the mini library makeovers?**

The findings revealed that the availability of a duty roster, as suggested by the team project, for the children to manage and supervise the operations of the mini library with minimal supervision from the teacher, was a success and fulfilled the SDG 4 (Quality Education) which focuses on ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all. Almost all of the respondents also reported that the children observed the colour coding system introduced by the team project in taking care and arranging their book collections at the book shelves. The use of colour coding stickers for the collection management of the books helped the kids tremendously in managing and supervising the operations of the mini library.

*“The kids at BJCK were more responsible and enthusiastic while assisting the teacher in the library. They are alert with the location of the books, they know how to put it back according to the colour coding at the books shelves without the need to remind them to do so (R1, R3)*

Collection development is a process of planning and building a useful and balanced collection of library materials over a period of years and an effective collection development is the most important factor for library quality and if the collections of the library are up to the mark, then the users will be satisfied (Bakhtiyar and Fahriyah, 2021; Khan & Bhatti, 2021). In conclusion, the findings revealed that the mini library makeover nurtures long life learning among the children through the observation of better operation procedure in terms of the collection management aspects of the SBJK and BJCK. As stated by Lastiwi & Badruesham (2018), the need of a reading area is a must in shelters and school even though the books collection and materials might not be up to date as it contributes to the quality education of the children.

### **RQ2: What are the benefits for the kids, volunteers and teachers after the mini library makeover?**

Based from the responses gathered, the majority of the children felt comfortable with the newly made over library and it was also found that they were excited to learn in the new environment. In addition, the respondents considered the library as a new alternative space for teaching and learning as it was convenient to conduct classes at the space. The findings also stated that the mini libraries were used as an alternative indoor game place and tuition classroom place. The availability of the dedicated space enables the process of learning among the marginalized children, thus supports the objective of SDG4 (Quality Education) since space matters. The notion is confirmed that the reason a library was chosen as the place to meet up among students was because it is comfortable, conducive and convenient and creates possible continuous social interactions especially among young people (Lin et al., 2015; Nurfarawahidah, B. & Kiran, 2017)

*“This place is very comfortable and convenient to conduct classes such as mathematics, geography and history. Sometimes students get bored when they learn in the same classroom, so their teachers bring them here as an alternative teaching and learning place. I use this mini library as an indoor game place for the kids to learn English in an interactive way through the visuals and images available in the books. There are a lot of books that are suitable with their level of reading skills. We also have extra classes with volunteer teachers from NGO and usually, we use our main hall to conduct the tuition class, but now we are so blessed to have this place” (R1), (R5)*

The findings also stated that the SBJK and BJCK children developed a sense of self belonging, participation and community engagement between them as the place nurtures the feeling of individual

well-being that relates to SDG10 (Reduce Inequalities) which among others promote freedom of expression, freedom of association and assembly and privacy to an individual's independence.

*"This mini library gives the kids a homie feeling as they have to take care of each book just like their own. After reading the books, they have been trained to put the books back at the right place. The experience makes them feel more appreciated and motivated. As teachers, we are happy to see them feeling this way. They become more disciplined, it seems like a small act, but it gives big impact for us as teachers. They know this makeover is for them and if they want to sustain it, they need to work on it"* (R2), (R3), (R4), (p2) and (p3)

### **RQ3: What are the impacts to BJCK and SBJK after the mini library makeover?**

The findings stated that the marginalized children of BJCK and SBJK felt encouraged to read and learn after the makeover project as they feel welcomed and comfortable with the new environment. The interest shown by the children connects to the aim of SDG4 in terms of lifelong learning opportunities as well as SDG10 in terms of freedom of association, safe and civic space. The findings also showed that the motivation of the teachers and volunteers of both BJCK and SBJK were higher due to better and improved facilities in helping them serve the children. It can also be seen that the mini library makeover give positive impacts to the behaviour of children as they become more responsible and more independent as they required less supervision from their teachers in doing their tasks.

*"As you can see, the list of books borrowing that you donated here is long. A lot of them love to read the books, especially "Komik MISI". I know that some of them could not really read, but so long as they still want to borrow the books and even though they just flip through the book, it shows that they want to read it, therefore, they show the interest to learn. The books are helpful and encourage them to polish their reading skills"* (R1)

*"We don't have a lot of rooms and conducive space in our school therefore, after the makeover project, most of the program with the NGOs were conducted at this library, especially the ones involving small groups since after the "haunted" feeling has been ridded off from the makeover. The mini library also offers more privacy and easy for the NGOs to conduct their programs here"* (R1)

Based from the findings, the researchers believe that in order to sustain the good impact of the makeover project, a lasting interest on reading and learning among the children must be preserved. The reading habits must be cultivated correctly for them to be turned into a culture which could be achieved through the availability of adequate, varied and easy-to-find reading material that can fulfill the reader's desire. These research findings will guide the librarians in developing reading modules that is more suitable for marginalized kids and assist the volunteers in developing a library that fulfills the needs of special group children. As such, it is recommended that the existing reading modules in the mini library be improved with a more quality collections to suit the ability and the level of understanding of these children. It is also recommended that more engaging materials with easy ICT application be introduced for future project to ensure the objectives of the SDG4 and SDG10 be achieved.

### **Conclusion**

As a conclusion, the findings obtained from the mini library project conducted two years ago has shown that the project has fulfilled the initial objectives of supporting the community through the makeover initiatives on less privileged and marginalized groups in Chow Kit and has also achieved the goals of UN2030 Agenda of SDG4 and SDG10. The findings have also proven that the team's initiative has a high merit in supporting the UN SDGs with the goals of ending poverty, protecting the planet and ensuring that everyone, everywhere enjoys peace and prosperity (IFLA, 2018). As mentioned by Benson (2019), libraries remain a social service organization, and as such, it is imperative that sustainable development goals should not be left in the hands of few because its goals designed for all, to be embraced by all and for the benefit of all. It is hoped that the valuable knowledge and skills gained

from the Chow Kit project could be transferred to other organizations and NGOs through more similar projects in the future.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Prior to the interview sessions with the respondents of this study, they have been made aware of the purpose of the study and we have obtained informed consent from the respondents. In order to ensure confidentiality for the respondents and the marginalized children involved in the interviews, the names have not been mentioned in the transcriptions and publication.

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