

## Project 1714 – Project Speak Up

Project Speak Up was held in UKM from 17<sup>th</sup> of July 2017 to 28<sup>th</sup> of August 2017 in UKM. It comprises of two main activities, a communication workshop and a literacy workshop. The goal of the communication workshop was to help students to increase their confidence level in speaking English, improve their ability to communicate and express their ideas in English. For the literacy workshop, its goal is to increase the literacy level of selected students.

To cover the cost for carrying out the project, we had all volunteers to pay a total amount of RM400 to help cover the costs of carrying out the project. In total, RM6800 was raised from collecting this amount from 17 volunteers. This amount is used to cover transportation and accommodation costs for the volunteers. We also had MyReader, our partner, to provide us with learning materials and sponsor us textbooks that contains the necessary modules to teach the students.

The project is carried out in a 6 weeks' format, and has volunteers from around the world to facilitate the sessions with the students. We carried out the project in 2 schools, SK Jalan Enam and SK Bangi Lama. In both schools, we targeted 2 classes with different English level, LINUS students for our literacy workshop and the top-class students for our speaking workshop.

We had a few unanticipated difficulties. The first one is we initially anticipated a total of 19 exchange participants (EP), however only 13 came to Malaysia. The other 6 EPs had some personal and visa issues that led them to not be able to come to Malaysia. This almost led us to a budget deficit in our project.

The second problem was a minor language barrier. When the EPs first came in to Malaysia, most of them could not understand the English that we spoke to them. Initially we thought that the EPs were less proficient in English than we have imagined, but eventually we realised that they could not understand us that well due to our accent, and they later got used to listening to Malaysian English.

The third problem was the children that they thought had problems communicating with our EPs. The LINUS students were very weak in English and could not understand much of what the EPs are saying. This led to some communication barriers between the EPs and the students.

The fourth problem was our students in SK Bangi were not suitable for the project. Their English proficiency were too high. This is due to false expectation setting regarding the English level that we hope for in students between the organising committee and the school teachers.

The last problem was that the impact measurement was not done very well. This is due to lack of time and miscommunication between the organising committee and the EPs. This led to no proper impact measurement technique implemented for the Speaking workshop, and we could not properly measure the impact that we have created for it. For the literacy classes, we did our impact measurement on the first and last day of class. However, some students were absent during the first and last day of classes, and we did not foresee this problem arising. This led to an incomplete impact measurement done for literacy classes.

However, what worked well was the schools that we went to were very supportive. Both SK Bangi and SK Jalan Enam tried to fulfil our requests as best as they could. During the project period, we requested SK Bangi for a bigger area to teach as a classroom is too congested, and they allowed us to use the school hall that was both spacious and cool. Both schools also took the initiative to update us about any sudden changes in their time table early to allow us to better prepare our schedules.

In total, our outreach was a total of 189 people, 88 primary school students benefited from the literacy workshop, 88 primary school students benefited from the speaking classes, 13 international university students benefited from the project, and 6 primary school teachers. For the literacy workshop a total of 37 students (incomplete information) went up a level in terms of reading skills, and this is based on the data we collected from the students based on MYReaders diagnostic tool.

In terms of short term impact, there was only a little growth in students in terms of reading abilities. However, we managed to give the students a certain level of exposure in terms of learning English by giving them more attention during classes (1 teacher to 3 students teaching method). This led to the students being able to pick up in their students, even if just a little, and be inspired to continue to learn and improve their reading abilities.

Besides, we also managed expose our international volunteers to the reality of the world, where a serious education gap exists. This helped inspire the volunteers to continue to help the community that they are in.

In my opinion, project Speak Up contributes to short term happiness as it helps students to improve their English literacy and speaking skills. In Malaysia, students are subjected to English classes with 1 teacher teaching 40 or more students, and the syllabus taught is standardise for all classes. When a student falls behind in class, they aren't given enough attention and help to catch back up due to teachers not having the capacity to give them enough attention. This leads to students feeling frustrated. By going through our program, students get to catch back up to the syllabus taught, and will feel more motivated and confident.

In terms of long term happiness, students can understand the importance of English. The EPs try their best to include various teaching methods while teaching, including word games, songs, videos etc. Doing so allows students to be exposed to the wide uses of English besides preparing for the exam, and will inspire them to further improve their English to be able to enjoy the many opportunities provided by learning English.

The project also made me realised that change doesn't happen in just 6 weeks. Even though our EPs and organising committee worked tirelessly for 6 weeks straight, the changes that occurred in the students were not a lot. Initially this made me very frustrated and demotivated. However, on the last day of classes, I heard a story from a student about the project, and what she said made me realise the impact of the project. She said, while crying "I feel very frustrated due to my weak proficiency in English. Because of it, I did not know that today is the last day for teacher Gustavo and teacher Francisco to see us, and I was not able to prepare something for them before they left, and was not able to tell them how grateful I am for them. I want to improve my English more to prevent this from happening." It made me realise that, change does not happen in just 6 weeks, but takes a lot of effort in a long period

of time, and I am glad that I was able to contribute, even if just a little, to a long-term impact to the community.

Lastly, mastering a language is a lifelong journey. Even if we were not able to grow a tree in 6 weeks, at the very least, we planted a seed in the ground.

Pictures and videos from project:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/0B0ZMbPL22DD1ckhjOGNmQmZxMIU>