Project Athena

07-24

Multi-year project

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Section 1: Project Overview

1.1 Area of Concern

An OECD study of 5800 Singaporean students showed that those from poor families were 4 times more likely to **perform worse academically** as compared to their **more affluent peers**.

Due to their **lower financial ability**, these students are unable to afford additional expenditure in the form of tuition, causing them to fall further behind their more affluent peers .

Additionally, with the COVID-19 situation, home-based learning has now been implemented. As such, **these differences and disparities have become even more apparent**, especially for those who faced poverty, jobless parents and domestic violence (David . S, 2020).

The teachers at KidsLEAP were mainly elderly retirees, and thus employed less digital learning platforms, which could be used to increase the engagement of the lessons. Furthermore, with the challenges posed by COVID-19, these volunteers faced difficulties in transitioning these classes online, as they are less tech-savvy. Thus, this is where we had to step in to take over, and conduct the lessons as a group via Zoom.

1.2 Challenges identified

After the first few visits, we found out that most of the children, aged 9 - 10, came from **disadvantaged backgrounds**, **lack a role model** and as a result, being **weak in English**

> "I wouldn't say they have much family support in terms of studies, **especially for English**, as they usually speak their mother tongue at home, Chinese or Malay, etc."

- Ms Rachel Lee, Director of FaithActs KidsLEAP Programme

To make matters worse, the sudden Covid-19 pandemic, has aggravated the **problems children faced at home** aforementioned and **digital divide**, thus how might we help them navigate out of this pandemic and teach them English at the same time.

1.3 Underlying Problem

Given that disadvantaged students **lack familiarity with technology** and that **their mode of learning** has been affected by COVID-19, how might we supplement their learning both in and out of the syllabus to better help them **adapt to the new normal** and **ever-evolving world**, while acting as a form of **peer support** for these disadvantaged individuals?

1.4 Plan of action

In order to meet the concerns mentioned in our underlying purpose, we focused on two main aspects. Firstly, we will **provide academic assistance** and enhance their digital skills. Secondly, we will **impart vital skills and values** that will allow them to become more readily equipped for the future.

Section 2: Implementation of action plan

2.1 Actions and Outcomes to Date

Date	Actions	Objectives
February 2020	• Partnered up with FaithActs organisation • Visited FaithActs	-
March to August 2020	**Activity 1 - English tuition** • Weekly english tuition sessions • Incorporate games such as Kahoot • A total of 40 sessions conducted	**Objective 1** - Provide academic assistance
May-June 2020	**Activity 2 - Gratitude sessions** • 3 weeks arts & crafts session to express gratitude towards their parents (for Father's Day) • Saying their gratitude towards Kidsleap	**Objective 2a** - To inculcate values within them **(gratitude)**

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[1] In light of the COVID-19 situation, we are unable to carry out weekly physical interactive sessions at FaithAct Methodist Church and any physical excursions. Therefore, the following action plan is all tweaked to comply with safe distancing measures and done via an online platform, Zoom.

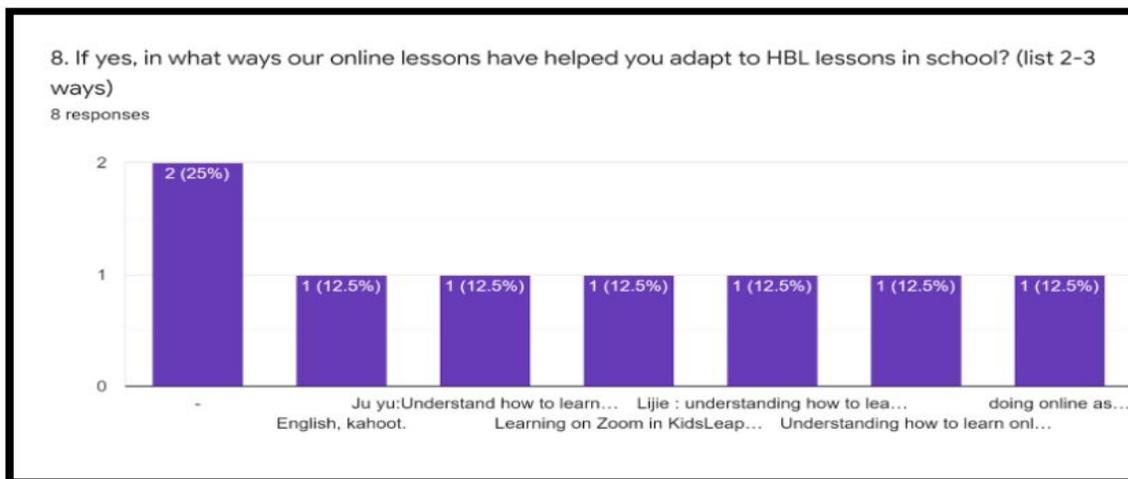| June 2020	**Activity 3 - Self-directed learning sessions** • Sessions that teaches students time-management skills to facilitate better self-directed learning	**Objective 2b-** To help students better adapt to HBL
July 2020	**Activity 4 - Digital learning sessions** • 3 weeks of sessions covering digital skills e.g. digital security, how to search for information online etc	**Objective 2b -** To help students better adapt to HBL
July 2020	**Activity 5 - Upcycling workshop** • Partnered with Project Upcycle • 2 hour session teaching & hands-on activity • Teaching students the importance of recycling & upcycling	**Objective 2a -** To Inculcate values within them (responsibility)

Section 3: Project Outcomes
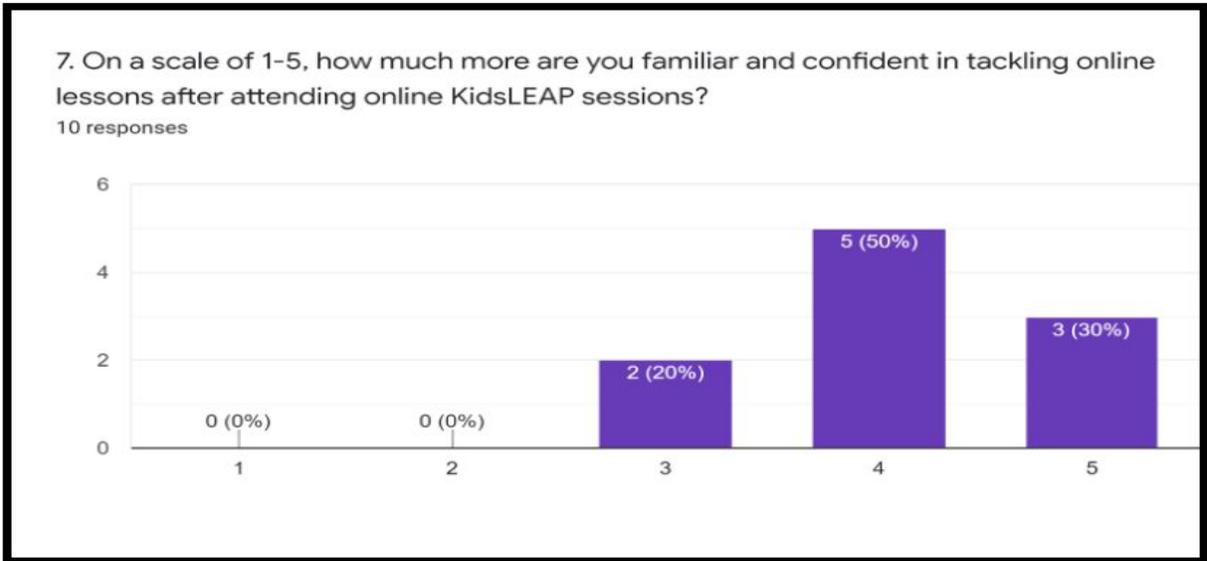
3.1 Accomplishments

In total, we taught **13 disadvantaged students** (all from New Town Primary School) throughout the span of **40 sessions**. With the advice of an ex-MOE teacher volunteer, we covered 6 major English topics, over a total of 40 online sessions.

To assess the impact of the activities in resolving our underlying problem, the students who we had taught were surveyed.
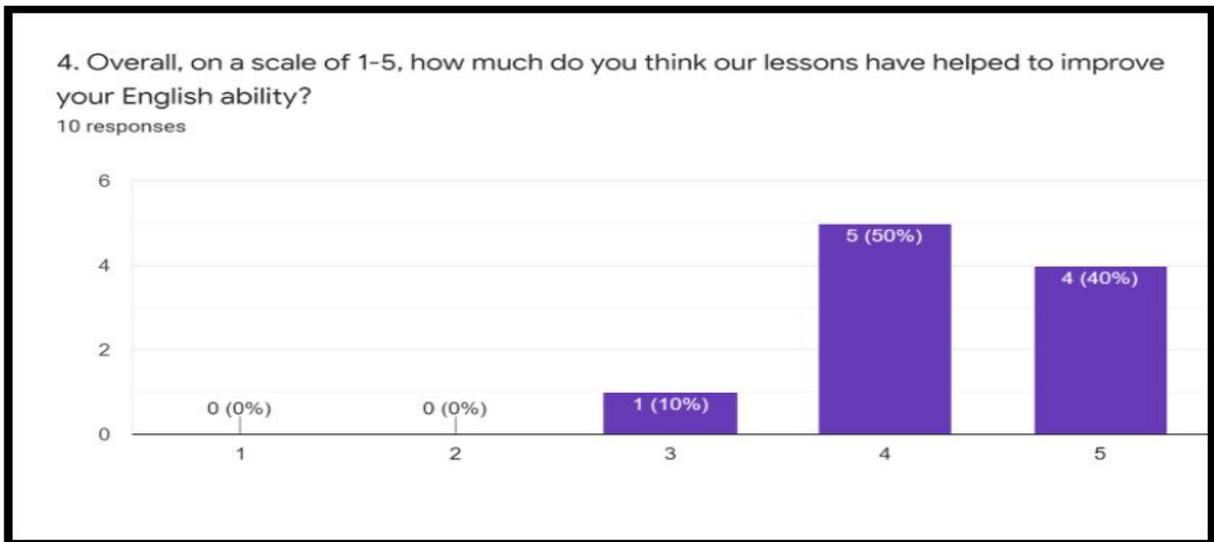
As can be seen from **Annex 1, 2 and 3,** the majority of disadvantaged students became more familiar with online lessons and online learning tools through our lessons, and have overall seen an improvement in their English standard.

Annex 1: Impacts on students' digital skills for HBL lessons in school

7. On a scale of 1-5, how much more are you familiar and confident in tackling online lessons after attending online KidsLEAP sessions?

10 responses

Annex 2 : Impact on their confidence tackling online lessons

4. Overall, on a scale of 1-5, how much do you think our lessons have helped to improve your English ability?

10 responses

Annex 3 : Impact on students' English ability

Furthermore, **Annex 4** highlights some of the takeaways students had during our supplementary lesson.
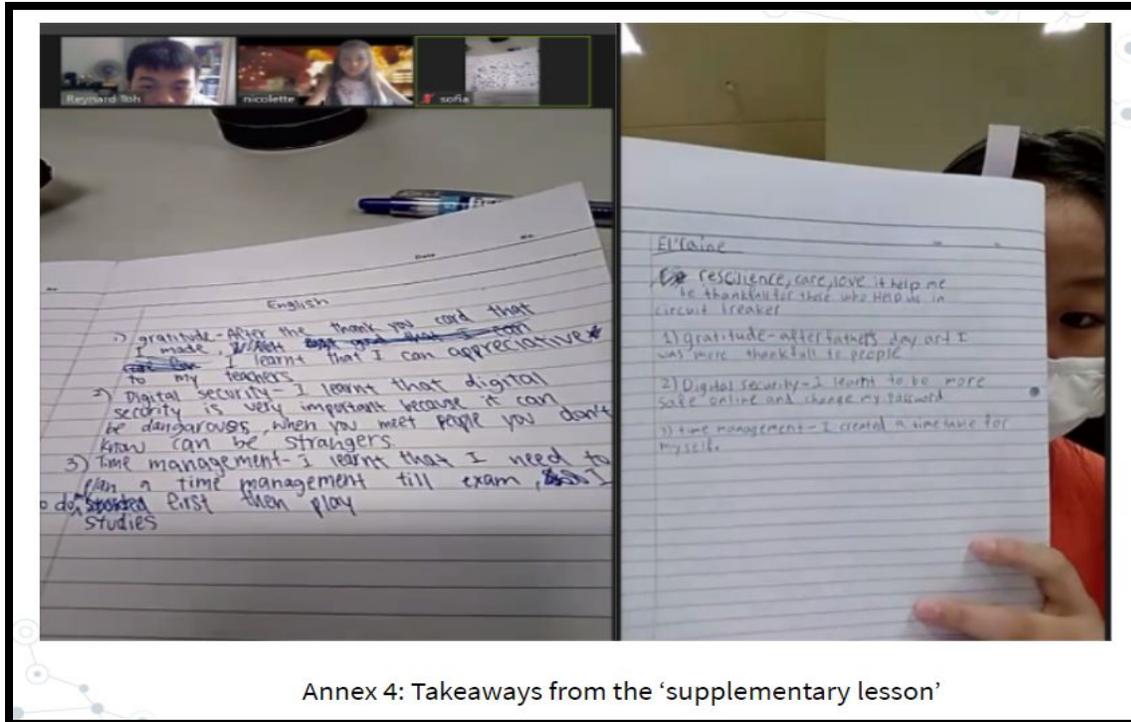
Annex 4: Takeaways from the 'supplementary lesson'

3.2 Reflections on Outcomes

As individuals, prior to this project, we assumed that the students were **rowdy and inattentive**, as the students initially seemed to not appreciate our lessons since they were easily distracted, which made us **disgruntled and unmotivated** to carry on with the project. However, as we carried out more lessons, we realised that they were **inquisitive learners** who put in their best effort.

As a group, we felt that throughout our KidsLEAP volunteering process, our biggest takeaway was not how we have impacted the kids, both academically and holistically, but rather the **bond** we forged throughout the lessons. Previously, due to the lack of familiarity between both parties, it was extremely hard for us to maintain a conversation throughout the online sessions. Now, they participate actively during lessons and share with us the problems they faced in school. Thus, we felt that such a bond is essential, as these children from challenging backgrounds will be more inclined to open up and

express their deep-seeded issues, enabling us to act as a form of emotional and social support for the students.

In the broader community, there are many others who are **not as fortunate** as we are, and we should **always lend a helping hand,** no matter how small the gesture may seem.

3.3 Sustainability

In our initial plan, we did not intend on continuing this project after Final evaluation. However, after the concerns raised by the judges about the **sudden abruption of the special bond we forged** with the students, we realised that it would be of best interest to maintain this bond with them. Hence, here are our plans:
- Resume KidsLEAP sessions after EOYs
- Find a suitable group of juniors to carry on Project Athena
- Graduation party for the graduating P4s
- Greater emphasis on forging **interpersonal relationships** with students, rather than purely a tutor-student relationship
- Greater emphasis on extracurricular lessons

3.4 Scope of Project

Community Impact: The wider school community in primary school would benefit, as disadvantaged students would become more accustomed to making use of online platforms to participate in lessons, allowing them to learn effectively during this pandemic and in the future where digital learning becomes more and more prevalent. This allows students to be more engaged in online lessons and fare better in their studies, no longer creating a segregated learning environment in which more well-off students equipped with better equipment are way ahead of their peers

<u>Resolution of UP:</u> Given that disadvantaged students lack familiarity with technology and that their pace of learning has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, we have engaged around 13 disadvantaged students in learning through online lessons and workshops. These students have shown improvement in making use of technology to facilitate their learning, as well as grown holistically, hence preparing them for the future.

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References (appendix)

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