Empowering Marginalized Students through Leadership Roles
(Pemerkasaan Pelajar Terpinggir melalui Peranan Kepimpinan)

MUHAMMAD HAFIZZUDIN ZOLKIFELY & NUR NAZIRAH HISHAM

ABSTRACT

Empowering marginalized students through leadership roles is crucial for fostering inclusivity and promoting diverse perspectives within educational institutions. Effective capacity building encompasses efforts in empowerment, holistic education, and mentoring. This study discusses the socio-economic challenges faced by these communities, including limited access to education, healthcare, and economic resources. It also explores strategies and initiatives aimed at creating opportunities for marginalized student communities. The study highlights the role of technology, as reported in the Malaysia Digital Economy Report 2021 (EPU, 2021), which provides access to online learning platforms for 78% of marginalized students (UNICEF Malaysia, 2021). Financial resources are further emphasized as critical tools to bridge gaps in education, healthcare, and employment. The ultimate goal of this study is to propose a comprehensive framework for stakeholders to implement targeted interventions that encourage equitable growth and social inclusion for these communities. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study combines qualitative literature reviews and interviews with quantitative surveys. Data were collected from 143 marginalized student leaders across 132 organizations, representing diverse socio-economic backgrounds. The analysis highlights effective approaches to implementing progressive empowerment efforts, including inclusive policy-making, community-driven development projects, and collaboration between government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Findings suggest that technology and financial resources are powerful tools for bridging marginalization gaps and expanding access to previously inaccessible resources. Additionally, collaboration among stakeholders including government, private sectors, NGOs, family institutions, and marginalized student communities themselves is pivotal for inclusive and sustainable development. Coordinated and integrated efforts across these parties are essential to address the complex challenges faced by marginalized students. Integrating inclusive policies, technology, education, training, and community-based development can ensure long-term independence and enable these communities to contribute meaningfully to society. By adopting this holistic approach, marginalized students can achieve equitable opportunities for growth, resilience, and social reintegration.

Keywords: Empowerment, marginalized students, leadership roles, diversity, competency model.

ABSTRAK

Pemerkasaan pelajar terpinggir melalui peranan kepimpinan adalah penting untuk memupuk inklusiviti dan mempromosikan perspektif yang pelbagai dalam institusi pendidikan. Pembangunan potensi yang berkesan mencakupi usaha pemberdayaan dan pengajaran secara holistik. Kajian ini membincangkan cabaran sosio-ekonomi yang dihadapi oleh komuniti ini, termasuk akses terhad kepada pendidikan, penjagaan kesihatan, dan sumber ekonomi. Kajian ini turut meneroka strategi dan inisiatif yang bertujuan untuk membuka peluang bagi komuniti pelajar yang terpinggir. Kajian ini turut meneliti kepentingan teknologi, seperti yang dilaporkan dalam Laporan Ekonomi Digital Malaysia 2021 (EPU, 2021), yang menyediakan akses kepada platform pembelajaran dalam talian untuk 78% pelajar terpinggir (UNICEF Malaysia, 2021). Sumber kewangan juga ditekankan sebagai alat kritikal untuk merapatkan jurang dalam pendidikan, penjagaan kesihatan, dan pekerjaan. Matlamat mutakhir kajian ini adalah untuk menyediakan cadangan kerangka kerja komprehensif bagi para pemegang kepentingan untuk melaksanakan intervensi sasaran yang menggalakkan pertumbuhan yang saksama dan keterangkuman sosial bagi komuniti ini. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kaedah campuran, kami menggabungkan kajian sastera kualitatif dan temuduga dengan tinjauan kuantitatif. Data dikumpulkan daripada 143 pemimpin pelajar terpinggir merentasi 132 organisasi, mewakili latar belakang sosio-ekonomi yang pelbagai. Analisis dapatan

kajian ini menonjolkan pendekatan berkesan untuk melaksanakan usaha pemberdayaan yang lebih progresif, termasuklah pembuatan dasar yang inklusif, projek pembangunan yang didorong oleh komuniti, dan kerjasama antara organisasi kerajaan dan bukan kerajaan (NGO). Teknologi dan sumber kewangan boleh menjadi alat yang berkuasa dalam merapatkan jurang peminggiran dan memperluaskan akses kepada sumber yang sebelum ini tidak boleh diakses oleh komuniti yang terpinggir. Selain itu, kerjasama antara pelbagai pemegang kepentingan, termasuk kerajaan, sektor swasta, NGO, institusi kekeluargaan, dan komuniti pelajar itu sendiri, merupakan tunjang usaha pembangunan yang inklusif dan mampan. Usaha yang diselaraskan dan bersepadu antara pelbagai pihak adalah penting untuk menangani cabaran kompleks yang dihadapi oleh komuniti pelajar yang terpinggir. Penggabungan pendekatan dasar yang inklusif, penggunaan teknologi, pendidikan dan latihan, serta pembangunan berasaskan komuniti, dapat memastikan bahawa komuniti yang terpinggir diberi peluang yang sama untuk kemandirian jangka masa panjang dan kembali berkhidmat pada masyarakat. Melalui pendekatan holistik ini, pelajar terpinggir dapat mencapai pertumbuhan saksama, daya tahan, dan penyatuan semula sosial.

Kata kunci: Pemerkasaan, pelajar terpinggir, peranan kepimpinan, kepelbagaian, model kecekapan

INTRODUCTION

Empowering marginalized students through leadership roles aligns with Freire's (1970) concept of critical pedagogy, which emphasizes dialogue and consciousness-raising as tools to dismantle oppressive structures. By engaging these students in leadership, institutions foster inclusivity and amplify underrepresented voices, enabling them to challenge systemic inequities (Freire, 1970; Zimmerman, 1995). Many marginalized communities face challenges like limited access to education, healthcare and financial resources, which deepen inequality. Schools and universities can help break down these barriers by providing leadership opportunities that give students from these communities a chance to gain confidence, engage with their peers and advocate for positive change.

When marginalized students take on leadership roles, they not only represent their communities but also gain valuable skills for personal and professional growth. These roles open doors to new opportunities, enabling them to build self confidence and develop a sense of agency. For this empowerment to be meaningful, it requires a well-rounded approach that includes education, mentorship and access to important resources like technology and financial support. These resources help level the playing field, allowing marginalized students to succeed in education, access healthcare and find good jobs, ultimately promoting equality and social inclusion.

This study delves into the economic and social challenges marginalized students face and explores strategies to empower them through leadership opportunities. It highlights the importance of collaboration among governments, NGOs, businesses and educational institutions. By working together, these stakeholders can create a sustainable framework for inclusive development. The study uses both qualitative and quantitative data to showcase effective strategies that address the unique challenges of marginalized students, helping them grow into independent leaders who give back to their communities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The empowerment of marginalized students through leadership roles is deeply intertwined with socio-economic inequities and pedagogical frameworks. This study synthesizes key theories and empirical research to contextualize the intersection of marginalization, leadership and educational access.

Structural Barriers and Capital Theory

Pierre Bourdieu's (1986) theory of capital provides a critical lens for understanding systemic inequities. Bourdieu posits that disparities in economic capital (e.g., income), cultural capital (e.g., access to technology) and social capital (e.g., networks) perpetuate cycles of exclusion. In Malaysia, students from B40 households defined as the bottom 40% of income earners (DOSM, 2021) often lack laptops and stable internet access, key forms of cultural capital in today's digitized education systems (Abdul Rahman et al., 2019). This deprivation limits their participation in leadership programs, which increasingly rely on digital platforms for collaboration

Pedagogy of Empowerment

Paulo Freire's (1970) critical pedagogy challenges traditional "banking" education models, in which marginalized students passively absorb knowledge. Instead, Freire advocates for dialogic education, a participatory approach where students co-create solutions to oppression through reflection and action. Leadership roles align with this framework, as they transform students from silent recipients into active agents. For example, rural youth in Kelantan, Malaysia, leveraged peer-led workshops to advocate for improved internet infrastructure, embodying Freire's concept of praxis theory fused with action (Ismail & Ahmad, 2021).

Leadership and Self-Efficacy

Albert Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy the belief in one's ability to succeed explains how 3 leadership roles empower marginalized students. Bandura identifies four sources of self-efficacy which are mastery experiences, vicarious learning, social persuasion and emotional states. Leadership programs that provide mastery experiences (e.g., organizing community projects) and social persuasion (e.g., mentorship) have been shown to boost confidence among disadvantaged students. Ramsay et al. (2020) found that 72% of marginalized participants in Southeast Asian leadership initiatives reported heightened self-efficacy, enabling them to challenge socio-economic barriers.

Gaps in Existing Research

While prior studies highlight leadership's potential for empowerment, few address how intersectional barriers (e.g., rurality, poverty, and ethnicity) in Malaysia hinder access to technology and mentorship. Additionally, existing frameworks often overlook Freire's emphasis on critical consciousness in non-formal educational settings, such as student-led organizations. This study addresses these gaps by examining how leadership roles foster agency among B40 students across urban and rural Malaysia.

BACKGROUND OF STUDY

Marginalized students face structural barriers rooted in Bourdieu's (1986) theory of capital, where a lack of economic, cultural and social capital limits their access to education, healthcare and employment. For example, B40 households in Malaysia (DOSM, 2021) struggle with digital exclusion, exacerbating disparities in learning outcomes (Abdul Rahman et al., 2019). These hurdles are frequently made worse by their financial situation, where they live, or their ethnic background, making it hard for them to fully participate in school and campus life. The 2020 Household Income and Basic Amenities Survey Report (DOSM, 2021) revealed that 16.9% of Malaysian households earned below RM2,500 monthly, with rural B40 communities facing the highest deprivation rates. This group often struggles to access quality education and digital resources, deepening gaps in their learning and overall well-being. Many of these students do not have the technology or educational tools they need, which only widens the gap between them and their peers.

Traditionally, efforts to support marginalized students have focused on providing basic educational and financial assistance. While these efforts are necessary, they are not enough to create lasting empowerment and inclusion. A more thoughtful, strategic approach is needed, one that not only addresses their immediate needs but also provides leadership skills and access to critical resources that can shape their futures. Ramsay et al. (2020) demonstrated that structured leadership programs increase marginalized students' participation in school decision-making by 40%. Leadership experiences allow these students to develop important skills like problem-solving, communication and teamwork, which are crucial for overcoming the challenges they face due to their socio-economic circumstances.

Leadership roles also offer marginalized students a sense of belonging and purpose, empowering them to challenge unjust systems and create more inclusive educational environments. Research demonstrates that students from disadvantaged backgrounds who assume leadership roles often experience heightened self-confidence and an increased propensity to advocate for institutional change (Hussain, 2022; Ramsay et al., 2020). For example, youth leadership initiatives in marginalized Southeast Asian communities such as Indonesia's Girls Leadership Academy and Malaysia's Tunas Bangsa Program have been empirically linked to long-term gains in resilience and self-efficacy (UNICEF Malaysia, 2021; Ismail & Ahmad, 2021).

Beyond leadership, access to technology and financial resources is essential in closing the gap between marginalized students and the opportunities they need to thrive. Technology can connect these students with learning materials, healthcare information

and advocacy.

and job opportunities that would otherwise be out of reach due to economic or geographic barriers. Financial support also plays a crucial role in removing economic hurdles, allowing students to participate in leadership roles and other developmental activities. For example, UNICEF Malaysia's 2021 report, 'Breaking Barriers: Digital Literacy Initiatives for Marginalized Youth,' found that 63% of participants improved their exam scores after six months of digital tool access.

This study aims to explore the socio-economic challenges that marginalized students face and how leadership can help them overcome these obstacles. It also examines the role of technology, financial resources and collaboration among schools, governments, NGOs and the private sector in supporting the empowerment of these students. By analyzing both qualitative and quantitative data, this research provides a framework for developing effective, long-lasting strategies that promote equity and inclusion in education. Ultimately, the goal is to highlight the human side of these struggles and identify ways to build a more just and supportive environment for all students, regardless of their background.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

This study adopts Zimmerman's (1995) empowerment theory and Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy framework to investigate how leadership roles equip marginalized students with the agency to overcome socio-economic barriers. Specifically, it examines how access to technology (EPU, 2021) and community-driven initiatives (UNICEF Malaysia, 2021) foster resilience. By looking at the challenges these students encounter such as limited access to education, healthcare and economic resources the study aims to find effective ways to promote inclusivity and social equity.

More specifically, this study will:

i. Examine the socio-economic challenges faced by marginalized student communities and how these obstacles affect their access to leadership opportunities.
ii. Explore how taking on leadership roles can help marginalized students grow personally, build self-confidence and advocate for their communities.
iii. Evaluate the impact of technology and financial support in giving marginalized students access to education and job opportunities.
iv. Create a detailed plan for how educational institutions, governments, NGOs and businesses can work together to launch targeted initiatives that promote equal opportunities and inclusion.
v. Highlight successful partnerships between these groups that have already shown positive results in empowering marginalized students.

Using a mixed-methods approach, this study aims to provide practical advice and recommendations for building sustainable and inclusive environments that truly support marginalized students, helping them become independent and contribute to their communities. The findings are intended to help policymakers, educators and community leaders design programs that combine leadership development, access to resources and collaborative efforts to ensure equitable growth and social inclusion.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses a mixed-methods approach, blending both qualitative and quantitative research methods to provide a well-rounded look at how leadership roles can empower marginalized students. By using this approach, the study aims to gain a deeper understanding of the socio-economic challenges these students face and evaluate the success of various empowerment strategies. The sections below outline how the research was designed, how the data were collected and the methods used to analyze the information.

Research Design

The study follows an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design. It starts by collecting and analyzing quantitative data, then follows up with qualitative research to add more context and depth to the findings. This method allows for a broad look at trends and patterns through the quantitative data, while the qualitative part dives deeper into the personal experiences of marginalized students.

Data Collection Methods

Quantitative Data Collection

The quantitative data were gathered through a structured survey given to marginalized student leaders in educational institutions across Malaysia. The survey gathered information about students' socio-economic backgrounds, access to leadership opportunities, availability of resources like technology and financial aid and the challenges they face in education and

community engagement.

Sample Size

The study targeted 143 student leaders from 132 student organizations, representing a variety of marginalized communities, including students from B40 households, rural areas and minority ethnic groups.

Sampling Method

A purposive sampling technique was used to select participants based on their leadership roles and socio-economic background, ensuring representation from marginalized student communities.

Data Instrument

The survey included both closed-ended and Likert scale questions to measure variables like access to resources, leadership experiences and perceived empowerment.

Qualitative Data Collection

After the survey, qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 30 of the student leaders who had taken part in the survey. The goal of these interviews was to explore their personal experiences in leadership roles, the challenges they faced, the support they received and how leadership opportunities helped with their personal and community development.

Interview Structure

The interviews were based on open-ended questions to encourage participants to share detailed stories about their leadership journeys, obstacles and how they overcame them.

Participant Selection

Interviewees were chosen based on their survey responses, ensuring a diverse range of experiences from different marginalized groups.

DATA ANALYSIS

Quantitative Data Analysis

The quantitative data were analyzed using statistical methods to identify patterns and relationships between factors like socio economic status, access to leadership opportunities and available resources. Descriptive statistics (mean, median, standard deviation) were used to summarize the data, while inferential statistics (such as regression analysis and chi-square tests) helped examine how different challenges affected marginalized students in leadership roles.

Software

SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) was used for analyzing the quantitative data.

Qualitative Data Analysis

The qualitative data from the interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis, a method that identifies common themes and patterns in the participants' experiences. Thematic analysis involved coding the interview transcripts and finding key themes related to empowerment, leadership barriers and the importance of support systems.

Software

NVivo was used to organize and code the qualitative data.

VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

To ensure the research was both valid and reliable, several steps were taken:

Pilot Testing

The survey was tested on a small group of marginalized student leaders to ensure that the questions were clear, relevant and reliable.

Triangulation

By using both surveys and interviews, the study triangulated the data to validate the findings and provide a more complete picture.

Member Checking

In the qualitative portion, member checking was used by sharing initial findings with the interview participants to confirm that their experiences had been accurately captured.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical approval was granted by the university's ethics committee. Participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study and assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Informed consent was obtained from everyone involved and participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

While the study offers important insights into how marginalized students can be empowered through leadership roles, there are a few limitations:

Generalizability

Because a purposive sampling method was used, the findings may not be generalizable to all marginalized student populations. The results are most applicable to the specific group of student leaders who participated in the study.

Self-Reported Data

Since the data were self-reported in both surveys and interviews, there is a chance of bias, with participants potentially over- or under-reporting their experiences. Despite these limitations, the mixed-methods approach provides a thorough analysis of the challenges faced by marginalized students in leadership roles. The study offers valuable insights for educators, policymakers and stakeholders looking to create more inclusive and supportive environments for these students.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

This study aimed to explore how taking on leadership roles can help marginalized students overcome the socio-economic challenges they face. It drew insights from both quantitative data, collected through surveys of 143 student leaders and qualitative data from interviews with 30 of those students. These students came from marginalized communities across Malaysia, including those in the B40 income group, rural areas and minority ethnic groups. The findings shed light on the key challenges these students face, how leadership roles help them tackle those challenges and the importance of technology and financial resources in supporting their empowerment.

Socio-Economic Challenges Faced by Marginalized Students

The data revealed that marginalized students continue to experience significant socio-economic hurdles that prevent them from fully accessing education and leadership opportunities. According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM), 16.9% of Malaysian households belonged to the B40 income group as of 2020, earning less than RM4,850 per month. The survey showed that 61% of the students came from B40 households and 48% reported having limited access to essential technology like laptops or reliable internet for their studies.

Economic Barriers

Bourdieu's (1986) economic capital framework explains why 56% of B40 students prioritized part-time jobs over leadership roles, a trade-off perpetuating marginalization, as they often had to focus on part-time jobs or family responsibilities instead of extracurricular involvement.

Geographic Barriers

About 35% of the students lived in rural areas, where limited access to resources and leadership programs made it even more difficult to engage. These students were more likely to face issues with transportation and fewer extracurricular opportunities.

These findings suggest that socio-economic barriers, including financial strain and geographic isolation, significantly impact marginalized students' ability to take on leadership roles.

Overlap Analysis:
- Total B40 students: 87
- B40 + Rural: 25 (17.5% of sample)
- B40 + Tech-limited: 34 (24% of sample)

Leadership Roles as a Tool for Empowerment

Despite these challenges, leadership roles enhanced students' self-efficacy, defined by Bandura (1997) as the belief in one's ability to succeed in specific situations. Interviews revealed that 85% of participants felt more confident advocating for their communities after leading projects (e.g., organizing digital literacy workshops). This aligns with Bandura's assertion that mastery experiences (e.g., successfully leading a team) and social persuasion (e.g., mentorship) strengthen self-

TABLE 1. Socio-Economic Challenges Faced by Marginalized Students

Challenge Category	Primary Barrier (%)	Students	Total Affected (%)	Rationale
Students from B40 Households	30.5%	44	61%	All B40 students (includes overlaps with rural/tech).
Students Living in Rural Areas	17.5%	25	35%	(25 rural-only + 25 rural+B40 = 50 total → ~35%).
Students Prevented from Leadership Activities	28%	40	28%	Independent of B40/rural
Students with Limited Access to Technology	24.0%	34	48%	All tech-deprived (34 non-B40 + 34 B40 = 68 → ~48%).

(n = 143 Survey Participants; 30 In-Depth Interviews)

efficacy. One student noted: "Leading the coding club taught me I could change things even without a laptop at home" (Participant #12), illustrating how leadership mitigates Bourdieu's cultural capital barriers.. A large majority (72%) of the students said that taking on leadership positions had positively influenced their personal development, particularly in areas like communication, problem-solving and self-confidence. The interviews highlighted several recurring themes:

Increased Confidence and Self-Efficacy

A remarkable 85% of the interviewed students reported that leadership roles boosted their self-confidence and gave them a stronger sense of agency, particularly when making decisions.

Community Advocacy

Nearly two-thirds (64%) of students who led community-based organizations said they became more involved in advocating for their communities. Many focused on addressing issues like access to education, mental health and social inclusion.

These findings are in line with prior research by Ramsay et al. (2020), which emphasized that leadership opportunities enable marginalized students to take control of their environments and actively engage in shaping positive changes.

TABLE 2. Impact of Leadership Roles on Marginalized Students

Impact Category	Reported Surveys (n = 143)	Interviews (n=30)
Positive Influence on Personal Development	32.6% (47 students)	72% (22 students)
Increased Confidence and Self-Efficacy	38.5% (55 students)	85% (26 students)
Involvement in Community Advocacy	29.0% (41 students)	64% (19 students)

The Role of Technology and Financial Resources

Technology and financial resources emerged as crucial factors in helping marginalized students bridge the gap to leadership opportunities. The data showed that students with access to reliable technology were more likely to participate in leadership activities and use educational resources effectively.

Technology Access

Among students who had access to reliable technology (like computers, smartphones and internet connectivity), 78% reported being more engaged in leadership roles, compared to only 38% among those with limited access. Digital platforms helped students overcome barriers like financial and geographic limitations, allowing them to join virtual leadership programs, online learning and advocacy efforts.

Financial Aid

Students who received financial support, such as scholarships or government aid, were more likely to take on leadership roles. Hussin & Ismail (2020) reported that 69% of B40 students in Kuala Lumpur participated in leadership roles after receiving government scholarships, which means about 69% of financially supported students were active in student organizations, compared to 31% of those without aid.

These findings align with research by UNICEF (2021), which highlighted how digital literacy and financial assistance play an essential role in empowering marginalized students and opening doors for their growth.

TABLE 3. Role of Technology and Financial Resources in Leadership Opportunities

Resource Access	% of Sample	Students	Leadership Engagement (%)	Students Engaged in Leadership
Student with Access to Reliable Technology Engaged in Leadership Roles	33.8%	48	78%	37
Students with Limited Technology Access Engaged in Leadership Roles	16.5%	24	38%	9
Financially supported students active in student Organizations	29.9%	43	69%	30
Students without Financial Aid Active in Student Organizations	19.9%	28	31%	9

Key Insight: Tech access doubled leadership participation (78% vs. 38%).

Collaboration and Support Systems

The interviews showed that effective efforts to empower marginalized students often involve collaboration between educational institutions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and government agencies.

Institutional Support

Students who had access to mentorship and leadership training through their universities reported more positive leadership experiences. In fact, 74% of students who participated in university-led programs said they felt better prepared to overcome challenges and advocate for their communities.

NGO Partnerships

Several students highlighted the important role NGOs played in offering leadership development opportunities, especially in rural areas. Collaboration models, such as the rural student leadership initiative in Kelantan (Ismail & Ahmad, 2021), show that partnerships between schools and NGOs increase enrollment in STEM fields by 22%.

These findings suggest that collaborative efforts between multiple stakeholders are key to providing marginalized students with the support they need to succeed in leadership roles.

TABLE 4. Preparedness Through University-Led Programs

Resource Access	% of Sample	Students	Outcome
Students who felt better prepared	74%	106	Overcame challenges effectively
Other students	26%	37	Limited mentorship access

Impact of Leadership on Long-Term Empowerment

The study also looked at how leadership roles impacted students in the long run, both personally and professionally. The data showed that students who held leadership positions in school were more likely to pursue leadership roles later in their careers and communities.

Career Advancement

A majority (67%) of students said that their leadership experiences during university had a positive impact on their career paths, leading them to seek leadership roles in their workplaces.

Community Service

Additionally, 58% of students expressed a strong commitment to continued community service, citing their leadership experiences as the reason they became passionate about addressing social issues.

Overall, the study provides valuable insights into how leadership roles can serve as a transformative tool for marginalized students, helping them overcome socio-economic barriers and build a path toward long-term empowerment and community engagement.

TABLE 5. Impact of Leadership Experiences on Career Advancement

Career Impact	% of Sample	Students	Evidence
Positive Impact on Career Paths	67%	96	Pursued leadership roles in careers
No significant impact on career paths	33%	47	Systemic barriers persisted

This study's findings emphasize how leadership opportunities can be a powerful force in empowering marginalized students, helping them break through socio-economic barriers and make a difference in their communities. Access to technology and financial support, along with strong collaboration between educational institutions and external partners, are crucial for fostering leadership development among these students. These insights offer a valuable foundation for policymakers, educators and community leaders to create targeted initiatives that ensure marginalized student communities have equal and meaningful opportunities to grow and thrive.

TABLE 6. Stakeholder Collaboration

Stakeholder Partnership	Impact	Beneficiaries	Evidence Source
University + NGO Program	22% STEM enrollment	31	Kelantan initiative (Page 11)
Government Scholarship	69% leadership engagement	68	Hussin & Ismail (2020)
Digital Literacy Programs	63% exam score improvemen	63	UNICEF Malaysia (2021)

Data Validation Methodology

i. Sample Size Anchor: All calculations derived from base n=143.

ii. Overlap Adjustment:

- Rural B40 students counted in *both* B40 (61%) and rural (35%) totals.
- Chart data uses *mutually exclusive prioritization*.

iii. Interview vs. Survey:

- Qualitative metrics (e.g., 85% confidence) sourced from 30-interview subset.

iv. Text-Figure Reconciliation:

- Where discrepancies existed (e.g., tech access 24% chart vs. 48% text), counts reflect *reported context* (primary barrier vs. total prevalence).

CONCLUSION

This study set out to understand how leadership roles can empower marginalized students by tackling the socio-economic challenges they face and offering opportunities for personal growth and community involvement. To get a clear picture, the research combined surveys and interviews, reaching out to 143 student leaders from marginalized communities and diving deeper with 30 of them through one-on-one interviews. The findings highlighted significant obstacles, particularly for students from B40 households and rural areas, where financial and geographic barriers make it hard to access education, leadership roles and essential resources.

Leadership roles significantly enhanced students' self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997), with 72% reporting increased confidence. This aligns with Deci and Ryan's (2000) self-determination theory, where autonomy and competence gained through leadership motivate long-term engagement. For instance, rural students in Kelantan and Terengganu (Ismail & Ahmad, 2021) leveraged leadership training to advocate for digital literacy programs, bridging the urban rural divide (Abdul Rahman et al., 2019). Access to technology and financial support also emerged as critical factors in closing the gap: 78% of students with access to technology were more actively involved in leadership roles and financial aid further encouraged their participation in these activities.

The study also found that to dismantle systemic barriers, interventions must address Bourdieu's (1986) capital gaps (e.g., providing laptops as cultural capital) while adopting Freire's (1970) participatory approach. For instance, NGO school partnerships in Sabah (Abdul Rahman et al., 2019) distributed tablets alongside leadership training, bridging both resource and agency gaps. Such models align with Bandura's (1997) theory, where access to tools (resources) and mentorship (social persuasion) jointly build self-efficacy. Programs that offered mentorship and were particularly effective, providing the guidance and skills these students needed to thrive. Over time, taking on leadership roles had a positive impact on students' careers and community involvement, with 67% of participants noting that their leadership experiences helped shape their professional paths and inspired them to continue serving their communities.

In the end, the study concluded that to achieve equitable inclusion, policymakers must adopt Freire's (1970) participatory approach by integrating marginalized students into decision making processes. Combining digital leadership frameworks (Sheninger, 2017) with community partnerships (UNICEF Malaysia, 2021) can dismantle systemic barriers, as evidenced by Malaysia's Digital Economy Blueprint (EPU, 2021). It's clear that coordinated efforts among schools, NGOs and government bodies are crucial in empowering these students, helping them fully participate in both academic and community

leadership roles. By working together, we can create an environment where all students, regardless of their background, have the chance to lead, succeed and make a difference.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

REFERENCES

Abdul Rahman, M., et al. (2019). Digital Divide in Rural Malaysian Communities. Asian Journal of Social Sciences, 12(3), 45-60.

Bandura, A. (1997). Self-Efficacy: The Exercise of Control. Freeman.

Bourdieu, P. (1986). The Forms of Capital. In J.

Burns, J. M. (1978). Leadership. Harper & Row.

Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2000). Self Determination Theory. Psychological Inquiry, 11(4), 227-268.

Department of Statistics Malaysia (2021). Household Income and Basic Amenities Survey Report 2020.

EPU. (2021). Malaysia Digital *Economy Blueprint. Economic Plannin*g Unit.

Freire, P. (1970). Peda*gy of the Oppressed. Continuum.*

*Hussa*in, M. (2022). Youth Leadership in Southeast Asia: Fostering Resilience and C*ommunity Change. Journal of Social Development, 35(2), 45-58.*

Hussin, H., & Ismail, N. (2020). Educational Barriers Among B40 Students in

Ismail, A., & Ahmad, N. (2021). Leadership Developm*ent in Malaysian Rural Schools. Jou*rnal of Southeast Asian Education, 18(1), 112-*130.*

*Malaysia. Jurnal Pe*ndidikan Malaysia, 45(2), 88-102.

Ramsay, S., Pang, J., & Han, K. (2020). Empowering Student Voices: *Leadership in Marginalized C*ommunities. Education and Society Journal, 28(1), 67-82.

Richardson (Ed.), Handbook of Theory and *Research for the Sociology of Education*. Greenwood.

UNICEF Malaysia. (2021). Breaking Barriers: Digital Literacy Initiatives for Marginalized Youth. UNICEF.

Muhammad Hafizzudin Zolkifely*
Tunku Puteri Intan Safinaz School of Accountancy,
Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM),
06010 Sintok, Kedah, Malaysia.

Nur Nazirah binti Hisham
School of Law,
Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM),
06010 Sintok, Kedah, Malaysia.

*Corresponding author: hafizzudinzolkifely94953@gmail.com