



EMPOWERING MARGINALIZED CHILDREN THROUGH COMMUNITY-BASED EDUCATION: EVIDENCE FROM GAJAHWONG SCHOOL IN LEDHOK TIMOHO, YOGYAKARTA

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Abstract

Marginalized children are a vulnerable group who often experience limited access to education, a decent learning environment, and social support. The involvement of Gajahwong School as a form of community empowerment is crucial for children's well-being. This study aims to analyze two aspects: First, this study analyzes the educational conditions of marginalized children in Lethok Timoho Village before the presence of Gajahwong School. Second, this study analyzes the role of Gajahwong School in the empowerment process of marginalized children in Lethok Timoho Village. Using qualitative methods with purposive sampling techniques. The research subjects included the principal, educators, parents/guardians of students, and students of Gajahwong School. Data were obtained through observation, interviews, and documentation. The findings show that before the presence of Gajahwong School, children in Lethok Timoho Village generally faced various problems, such as low motivation to learn, limited access to education, lack of parental support, and a social environment that was less supportive of child development. Gajahwong School provides an alternative non-formal learning space that focuses on local curriculum-based education. Gajahwong School plays a role in raising awareness and the importance of education for marginalized children. With the involvement of educators, volunteers, families, and communities, education becomes more accessible and relevant to previously marginalized students. Although this study had limitations in gathering informants, it was able to demonstrate the conditions of marginalized children before and after the school's establishment. Therefore, this research goes beyond simply addressing the beneficiaries and strengthening the bottom-up approach to developing alternative education.

Keywords: Marginalized Groups; Empowerment; Education.

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Abstrak

Anak marginal merupakan kelompok rentan yang sering mengalami keterbatasan akses terhadap pendidikan, lingkungan belajar yang layak, serta pendampingan sosial. Keterlibatan Sekolah Gajahwong sebagai bentuk komunitas pemberdayaan masyarakat sangat penting bagi kesejahteraan anak-anak. Studi ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis pada dua aspek: Pertama, studi ini menganalisis kondisi pendidikan anak marginal di Kampung Ledhok Timoho sebelum kehadiran Sekolah Gajahwong. Kedua, studi ini menganalisis peran Sekolah Gajahwong dalam proses pemberdayaan anak marginal di Kampung Ledhok Timoho. Menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan teknik purposive sampling. Subjek penelitian meliputi kepala sekolah, edukator, orang tua/wali murid, serta peserta didik Sekolah Gajahwong. Data diperoleh melalui observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi. Temuan menunjukkan sebelum hadirnya Sekolah Gajahwong, anak-anak di Kampung Ledhok Timoho umumnya menghadapi berbagai permasalahan, seperti rendahnya motivasi belajar, keterbatasan akses pendidikan, kurangnya dukungan orang tua, serta lingkungan sosial yang kurang mendukung dalam perkembangan anak. Kehadiran Sekolah Gajahwong menjadi alternatif ruang belajar nonformal yang berfokus pada pendidikan berbasis kurikulum kelokalan. Sekolah Gajahwong berperan dalam meningkatkan akan kesadaran dan pentingnya pendidikan bagi anak-anak marginal. Dengan keterlibatan pendidik, relawan, keluarga, dan komunitas sehingga pendidikan menjadi lebih mudah dijangkau dan relevan bagi peserta didik yang sebelumnya terpinggirkan. Meskipun dalam penelitian ini memiliki keterbatasan dalam mengumpulkan informan, tetapi penelitian ini dapat menampilkan kondisi anak-anak marginal sebelum dan sesudah keberadaan sekolah tersebut. Sehingga penelitian ini bukan hanya sekadar penerima manfaat, tetapi juga memperkuat pendekatan bottom-up dalam pengembangan pendidikan alternatif.

Kata Kunci: Kelompok Marginal; Pemberdayaan; Pendidikan.

INTRODUCTION

Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, particularly Article 5, emphasizes that every citizen has the right to obtain a quality education.¹ Education is positioned as a basic right of every child without differentiating social, economic, cultural or residential background.² However, social reality shows that the fulfillment of the right to education has not been fully realized evenly, especially for children who are in marginal conditions.³ Marginalized child groups still face various

¹Lukman Hakim, 'Pemerataan Akses Pendidikan Bagi Rakyat Sesuai Dengan Amanat Undang-Undang Nomor 20 Tahun 2003 Tentang Sistem Pendidikan Nasional', *EduTech: Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan Dan Ilmu Sosial*, 2.1 (2016).

²Halder Rimi, Ghassan Salibi, and N Tzenios, 'Importance of Orphan and Low Socioeconomic Backgrounds Education in Society Authors', *Special Journal of the Medical Academy and Other Life Sciences*, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.58676/sjmas.v3i1.102>.

³Dan Zan, 'Bridging Divides: Educational Challenges Faced by Rural-Urban Migrant Children in China', *SHS Web of Conferences*, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1051/shsconf/202419302016>.

structural and cultural barriers that cause them to be marginalized from access to decent and sustainable formal education.⁴

Marginalized children generally live in vulnerable socio-economic conditions, with limited family resources, less conducive living environments, and minimal institutional support.⁵ Various international studies show that children from marginalized groups have a higher risk of dropping out of school, low academic achievement, and limited development of life skills, which ultimately reinforces the intergenerational cycle of poverty.⁶ This condition confirms that educational inequality is not just an individual problem, but a structural problem that requires more contextual and inclusive social intervention.

Although the Special Region of Yogyakarta is widely known as a student city, issues related to educational equality remain a significant challenge. Data from the Yogyakarta Education and Training Agency (BPMP) in 2025 showed that 12,956 children in the region were recorded as not receiving formal education, either due to dropping out of school, not continuing their education after graduation, or never having attended school at all. Children from marginalized groups have diverse backgrounds and circumstances, influenced by various factors, such as family economic circumstances, geographic location, family social situation, and parental education level.⁷ The characteristics of marginalized children can be classified into three main dimensions: geographic, economic, and social. Geographically, children living in remote areas often experience limited access to information and technology.⁸ Economically, children from underprivileged families often have to help their parents work to support the family's needs, so their opportunities to go to school are limited.⁹ Meanwhile, from a social aspect, disharmonious family conditions and less than conducive living environments can have an impact on the welfare and future of these children.¹⁰

Ledhok Timoho Village is an area inhabited by marginalized communities, including street children, homeless people, and the urban poor. It has subsequently developed into a residential area with limited access to basic services, such as education, health care, and civil service. Many children in this area are unable to access formal education due to economic and social constraints, the lack of birth certificates, and various other

⁴Boby Joseph Thadathil and Simrika Basnet, 'Educational Experiences of Slum and Migrant Children in Government Schools of Kathmandu Valley', *International Journal For Multidisciplinary Research*, 2023 <https://doi.org/10.36948/ijfmr.2023.v05i05.7038>.

⁵Keith M Lewin, 'Contingent Reflections on Coronavirus and Priorities for Educational Planning and Development', *Prospects*, 49.1 (2020), 17-24.

⁶Elaine Unterhalter and Colleen Howell, 'Unaligned Connections or Enlarging Engagements? Tertiary Education in Developing Countries and the Implementation of the SDGs', *Higher Education*, 81.1 (2021), 9-29.

⁷Sabit Rahim and others, 'Harnessing Generative AI: Reviewing Applications, Challenges, and Solutions for out-of-School Children in Developing Regions', *Sustainable Futures*, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sfr.2025.101206>.

⁸J Graves and others, 'Disparities in Technology and Broadband Internet Access Across Rurality', *Family & Community Health*, 44 (2021), 257-65, <https://doi.org/10.1097/fch.0000000000000306>.

⁹Jaret Hodges, Rachel Mun, and Anne Rinn, 'Disentangling Inequity in Gifted Education: The Need for Nuance in Racial/Ethnic Categories, Socioeconomic Status, and Geography', *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 66 (2022), 154-56, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00169862211040533>.

¹⁰Meri Sandora, 'Konsep Pendidikan Anak Marginal Dalam Perspektif Pendidikan Berbasis Masyarakat', *Marwah: Jurnal Perempuan, Agama Dan Jender*, 18.2 (2019), 196-216.

administrative barriers.¹¹ Before the arrival of Gajahwong School, the educational situation for children in this area was characterized by low motivation to learn, limited facilities, and minimal educational support from family and the surrounding community. This situation resulted in many children lacking the opportunity to develop their full potential.¹² To address these issues, Gajahwong School is an alternative education program focused on empowering marginalized children. This school not only provides access to learning but also plays a role in raising awareness of the importance of education. The establishment of Gajahwong School is an effort to transform marginalization into a space of opportunity for marginalized children in Ledhok Timoho Village.

Gajahwong School was officially established in 2009 with the mission of providing free education to underprivileged children in Ledhok Timoho Village. This institution is primarily aimed at children who have never attended school or have had difficulty accessing formal education. The curriculum implemented focuses not only on basic skills such as reading, writing, and arithmetic, but also includes learning about the environment, social values, and community empowerment relevant to the lives of children in the surrounding area.¹³ This contextual approach allows the learning process to be tailored to local needs and social realities. In line with Jim Ife's thinking on community development, community based education emphasizes the importance of community empowerment through strengthening local capacity and active citizen participation, not only in academic aspects but also in the development of independence and social values.¹⁴

Previous research also shows that community-based educational innovations have been widely developed in Indonesia. Fathayatul Husna emphasized that Islamic boarding schools are a form of community-based educational innovation that contributes significantly to character building and social development.¹⁵ Meanwhile, Asril discovered that Smart Schools in Pekanbaru have been able to become an educational bridge for children in marginal areas since 2007.¹⁶ These findings demonstrate that community-based educational innovations have significant potential to address educational inequality. In this context, Gajahwong School can be understood as a form of educational innovation in the Gajahwong River basin that deserves further in depth study, particularly from the perspectives of the sociology of communication and social empowerment.

A study specifically examining Gajahwong School was conducted by Suci Rahayu Ningsih. This study discusses TAABAH in the process of empowering children by carrying out several stages of empowerment such as determining the location of activities, socializing activities through routine community forums. Raising awareness with a personal and group

¹¹Agistya Risna Sari and Mohammad Agung Ridlo, 'Studi Literature: Identifikasi Faktor Penyebab Terjadinya Permukiman Kumuh Di Kawasan Perkotaan', *Jurnal Kajian Ruang*, 1.2 (2021).

¹²Putu Ayu Dewi Puspita Wulandari, 'Modal Sosial Dan Sekolah Bagi Penduduk Miskin Perkotaan:(Studi Kasus Sekolah Gajah Wong Di Ledhok Timoho, Yogyakarta)' (Universitas Gadjah Mada, 2016).

¹³Derry Ahmad Rizal and Moh Syaiful Bahri, 'Konsep Pemberdayaan Masyarakat Dalam Pandangan Karl Marx Dan Max Weber', *Mawaizh: Jurnal Dakwah Dan Pengembangan Sosial Kemanusiaan*, 13.02 (2022), 189-209.

¹⁴Jim Ife and others, *Community Development: Alternatif Pengembangan Masyarakat Di Era Globalisasi* (Pustaka Pelajar, 2008).

¹⁵Fathayatul Husna, 'Inovasi Pendidikan Pada Kaum Marginal', *Jurnal Sosiologi USK (Media Pemikiran & Aplikasi)*, 12.1 (2018), 38-54.

¹⁶Asril Asril, 'Penerapan Strategi Belajar Peta Konsep (Concept Mapping) Untuk Meningkatkan Hasil Belajar Pkn Siswa Kelas IV Sekolah Dasar', *Primary*, 7.1 (2018), 112-21.

approach. Organizing communities and academics. Implementation, providing free elementary school education, early childhood education, TPA and tutoring. Advocating for the government and business actors. Politicization by assessing academics, carrying out tension through mass media and real actions. Daily, weekly, and monthly evaluations. As well as the process of empowering children there are internal and external supporters, namely spiritual or material support from the Ledhok Timoho community and business actors. Internal obstacles are cultural structural problems that cause circle activities to not run well. While external obstacles are structural problems related to the legality of the school that affect the lack of empowerment funds. The similarity in this research is that the object of the research is Gajah Wong School as it is a place to provide education for poor or lower middle class children, while the difference is that this research examines the entire program at TAABAH, so the scope of this research is broader.¹⁷

This research presents a novel aspect because it not only focuses on community-based alternative education such as Gajahwong School, but also examines the conditions of marginalized children before and after the school's existence. Thus, this study is able to present a picture of the social and educational dynamics in Ledhok Timoho Village. Furthermore, this study emphasizes the role of the local community as the primary driver in building inclusive education, not merely as beneficiaries, thus strengthening the bottom-up approach in developing alternative education. However, this study has limitations in collecting informants, both students and parents. This makes the data obtained less diverse and does not fully represent the overall experience of the community.

Based on this description, this study is crucial for analyzing the educational conditions of marginalized children in Ledhok Timoho Village before the arrival of Gajahwong School, as well as for in-depth examination of the role and contribution of Gajahwong School in empowering marginalized children. This research is expected to provide academic contributions to the development of non-formal education and community empowerment studies, while also providing practical recommendations for strengthening inclusive education policies for marginalized children in urban areas.

METHOD

This research employs a qualitative method as the primary approach, chosen because it is considered most appropriate to the characteristics of the problem being studied. Gajahwong School's efforts to empower marginalized children cannot be analyzed solely through numerical data or statistical measurements. This issue involves real-life dimensions, a multi-layered network of social relationships, and organizational dynamics that can only be fully understood when the researcher is present and interacts directly within the social environment. Therefore, a qualitative approach is the most relevant because it opens up space for researchers to explore and understand the meaning felt and experienced by all parties involved, from administrators and educators to the children and their families as the beneficiaries of the empowerment.¹⁸ This research focuses on how Gajahwong School plays a role in ensuring children from underprivileged families continue

¹⁷Suci Rahayu Ningsih, 'Pemberdayaan Anak Kaum Marginal Melalui Pendidikan Berbasis Lingkungan (Studi Kasus: Sekolah Gajah Wong Kampung Ledhok Timoho, Kelurahan Balerejo Mujamuju, Kecamatan Umbulharjo Kota Yogyakarta)', *Fakultas Ilmu Sosial Dan Ilmu Politik Jurusan Sosiologi Universitas Negeri Surakarta*, 2025.

¹⁸Lexy J Moleong, 'Metode Penelitian Edisi Kualitatif Edisi Revisi', *Bandung: PT Remaja Rosdakarya*, 2019.

to have access to education. This focus was determined based on careful consideration. Gajahwong School is a non-formal educational institution operating in a remote area and continuously serving segments of the community beyond the reach of conventional educational institutions. By placing this institution at the center of the research, the assessment process can be conducted in greater depth and context, resulting in a detailed picture of the empowerment practices implemented.

To determine relevant sources of information, this study employed a purposive sampling technique. This technique meant that informants were not selected haphazardly, but rather through a selection process that considered the extent to which individuals had involvement, understanding, and experience directly related to the research topic. The informants in this study consisted of the Gajahwong School principal as the leader and decision-maker at the institutional level, educators as the parties directly implementing the program in the field, parents or guardians of students as part of the community who felt the impact of the program, and a child who actively participated in school activities as a direct beneficiary of the entire empowerment process. These four informants were selected so that the collected data could represent various perspectives simultaneously, so that the resulting analysis would not rely solely on a single perspective.¹⁹

In terms of data collection, this study employed three techniques. The first technique was observation, which was conducted by directly observing the behavior and activities of participants at the research site. Several aspects of the empowerment process can only be identified through direct observation in the field, such as how interaction patterns between educators and students are formed, how the learning process occurs naturally, and how the school responds to the various needs of the surrounding community. The second technique was interviews, which were used to explore the personal meanings and experiences of informants that are not always apparent from observation alone. Through interviews, researchers were able to ask open-ended and exploratory questions, allowing informants the freedom to express their perspectives honestly and in-depth. Interviews can be tailored to the situation, either in person or utilizing digital communication platforms such as Zoom or WhatsApp, as a natural response to conditions in the field without compromising the depth and quality of the data obtained. The third technique was documentation, which serves as both a supporting data source and a means of verifying the validity of the information. Various sources of documentation, such as official websites, social media platforms, reference books, news coverage, and scientific publications, provided background data that helped researchers understand Gajahwong School's track record and institutional position, while also serving as comparative material for information obtained from interviews and observations. Additionally, audio recordings of interviews, photo documentation, and video recordings of activities were used to strengthen the overall validity of the research data.²⁰

Overall, the methodological design applied in this study demonstrates a consistent integration between the objectives to be achieved, the approach used, the selection of informants, and the method of data collection. Each methodological choice was not made merely to comply with the conventions in scientific writing, but because each has a real contribution in supporting the researcher's efforts to gain a comprehensive and meaningful

¹⁹Sugiyono, 'Metode Penelitian Kualitatif dan R&D', *Alfabeta, Bandung*, 2016.

²⁰Ahmad Rijali, 'Analisis Data Kualitatif', *Alhadharah: Jurnal Ilmu Dakwah*, 17.33 (2018), 81-95.

understanding of the role of Gajahwong School in the process of empowering marginalized children amidst the various limitations that surround their lives.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. Conditions of Marginalized Children's Education in Ledhok Timoho Village Before the Presence of Gajahwong School

The lives of marginalized children living in Ledhok Timoho Village, especially in the Gajahwong River bank area, take place in a social situation with multidimensional limitations and vulnerabilities.²¹ Settlements in this area are characterized by the physical condition of buildings that are unfit for habitation, as well as minimal access to basic services such as health and education.²² Such a living environment not only shapes the physical reality of children's daily lives, but also has a major influence on their psychological and social construction, including how they view themselves, their educational values, and the future they can achieve.²³ In this context, poverty is not only material, but also cultural and structural.

Most marginalized children in Ledhok Timoho Village come from poor urban families who rely on the informal sector for their livelihood. Their parents work as casual laborers, scavengers, small traders, street musicians, or other odd jobs, earning low and uncertain incomes.²⁴ Family economic instability makes fulfilling basic daily needs a top priority, while education is often seen as a secondary need that can be postponed.²⁵ Children in these families are often involved in household economic activities, both directly and indirectly, to help support the family income. As a result, time that should be spent studying, playing, and resting becomes severely limited. This situation is exacerbated by the parents' low level of education, which leads to minimal home learning support and a low awareness of the importance of education as a long-term investment for children's social mobility.²⁶

From the perspective of structural poverty theory, the poverty experienced by families in Ledhok Timoho is not the result of individual laziness or incompetence, but rather a product of economic and social structures that do not provide them with space to escape the cycle of deprivation. William Julius Wilson and other structuralist thinkers assert that poverty is the result of a system that actively excludes certain groups from access to resources, opportunities, and social mobility. This is clearly illustrated by the fact that parents working as scavengers, casual laborers, and street musicians is not a free choice, but rather the only option left within a non-inclusive economic structure. Poverty here touches

²¹Yudani Putu Krisna, N E Sri Nastiti, and Kirami Bararati, 'Penerapan Konsep Mutualisme Pada Penataan Kampung Bantaran Sungai Semampir Surabaya', *Jurnal Sains Dan Seni ITS*, 5.2 (2016).

²²Anggalih Bayu Muh Kamim, Ichlasul Amal, and Muhammad Rusmul Khandiq, 'Problematisa Perumahan Perkotaan Di Kota Yogyakarta', *Jurnal Sosiologi USK (Media Pemikiran & Aplikasi)*, 13.1 (2019), 34-54.

²³Zainal Abidin Matondang, 'Analisis Efektivitas Pengentasan Kemiskinan (Studi Kasus Penerima PKH Di Kelurahan Padangmatinggi Lestari)' (IAIN Padangsidempuan, 2022).

²⁴Ropingi Ropingi, 'Perilaku Sosial Masyarakat Lembah Sungai Gajah Wong Yogyakarta', *Jurnal Penelitian Dan Evaluasi Pendidikan*, 6.1 (2004), 57-71.

²⁵Annis Amalia, 'TEKAP (Persepsi Keluarga Pemulung Tentang Pendidikan, Di Kelurahan Sirantau, Kecamatan Datuk Bandar, Kota Tanjung Balai)' (Universitas Sumatera Utara, 2009).

²⁶Riza Azwari, 'Pemberdayaan Anak Jalanan Di Lembaga Sosial Hafara Yogyakarta' (UIN SUNAN KALIJAGA, 2014).

not only the material aspect, but also penetrates the cultural and structural dimensions that are interconnected.²⁷

The phenomenon of child labor has become an inseparable reality in the lives of children in Ledhok Timoho Village. Many children must work to help their parents meet their family's daily economic needs. This condition is a manifestation of structural poverty that forces children to sacrifice their basic rights, especially the right to education.²⁸ Regarding child labor in Indonesia, it explains that children from poor families are often positioned as additional economic resources who must contribute to the family income. These children work as buskers, newspaper vendors, scavengers, or help their parents sell goods on the streets.²⁹ Consequently, childhood, which should be filled with learning and play, is replaced by the burden of economic responsibilities inappropriate for their developmental stage. For these families, the decision to employ children is not a voluntary choice, but rather a forced one as a survival strategy in times of economic hardship.³⁰ Furthermore, there are high dropout rates and discontinuation of education, especially at the elementary and junior high school levels. Children who do attend school often fail to stay for long due to various factors, such as the inability to pay for indirect school costs (uniforms, books, transportation), work demands, and academic backwardness that makes them feel unable to keep up with their studies.³¹

In addition to economic factors, social and cultural barriers also play a significant role in limiting access to education for marginalized children. Low parental education directly impacts their understanding of the value and benefits of formal education. Within the framework of social capital and cultural capital theory, families from lower social classes tend to have limited cultural capital, such as the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that support educational success. These limitations impact the educational aspirations of families and their children. In Ledhok Timoho Village, many parents lack adequate school experience, so formal education is not perceived as a vital means to improve quality of life. The pragmatic view that working and earning money is more profitable than attending school is dominant in this community.³² Parents' educational level has a significant influence on their children's educational attainment. Parents with low educational backgrounds tend to have limited ability to provide academic support, motivation for learning, and supervision of their children's educational process.³³

²⁷Tengku Haniffinda Nugraheni, 'Implementasi Program Pemberdayaan Di Bidang Pendidikan Anak Kaum Masyarakat Miskin Kota Oleh Komunitas Ledhok Timoho', 2021.

²⁸Fitri Ramdhani Harahap, 'Dampak Urbanisasi Bagi Perkembangan Kota Di Indonesia', 2013.

²⁹Nurharlinah Nurharlinah, Rini Herdiani, and Ari Athiutama, 'Pengalaman Anak Sekolah Dasar Berjualan Pempek Palembang Dalam Perpektif Keperawatan Komunitas', *JKM: Jurnal Keperawatan Merdeka*, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.36086/jkm.v5i1.2676>.

³⁰Suci Rahayu Ningsih, 'Pemberdayaan Anak Kaum Marginal Melalui Pendidikan Berbasis Lingkungan (Studi Kasus: Sekolah Gajahwong Kampung Ledhok Timoho Kelurahan Balerejo Muja Muju Kecamatan Umbulharjo Kota Yogyakarta)', 2015.

³¹Edward Melio Bertho and Nadya Grestyana, 'Strategi Pemerintah Dan Partisipasi Masyarakat Dalam Pengelolaan Dan Penanganan Permukiman Kumuh Di Kawasan Mendawai Kota Palangka Raya', *Edu Sociata: Jurnal Pendidikan Sosiologi*, 6.1 (2023), 395-402.

³²Silvia Rogošić and Branislava Baranović, 'Social Capital and Educational Achievements: Coleman vs. Bourdieu', *Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal*, 6.2 (2016), 81-100.

³³James S Coleman, 'Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital', *American Journal of Sociology*, 94 (1988), S95-120.

Administrative and legal documentation issues also seriously hinder marginalized children's access to education. Many families living in riverbank settlements lack complete and valid citizenship documents. Some children lack birth certificates because their parents are unable or unwilling to obtain them, while other families lack valid family cards due to legally unclear residential status.³⁴ When the formal education system requires complete administrative documents as a prerequisite for school registration, children from families without such documents are automatically marginalized and their access to education is blocked.³⁵ The lack of legal documentation is a major barrier for children from poor families in accessing public services, including education. These children become invisible in the state administration system and ultimately deprived of their basic rights as citizens.³⁶

Furthermore, there is a lack of adequate play and learning spaces for the children of Ledhok Timoho Village. The absence of playgrounds, libraries, or community learning spaces means children spend most of their time on the streets, riverbanks, or in cramped areas around their homes. These spaces are not designed to support children's physical or cognitive development. This situation exacerbates the disparity in learning experiences for marginalized children compared to children from more affluent families.³⁷ They grow up without early literacy stimulation, such as reading books, educational games, or creative activities. As a result, many children experience delays in reading, writing, and arithmetic (basic literacy), even when they reach school age. This delay makes it even more difficult for them to adapt when they eventually enter the formal education system.³⁸

The accumulation of various forms of powerlessness experienced by children and parents in Ledhok Timoho Village is what has given rise to the urgency for education activist groups to undertake social intervention. The presence of Gajahwong School is a concrete manifestation of a collective effort to transform marginalization into a space of opportunity.³⁹ Gajahwong School is a non-formal educational institution based on volunteerism and community empowerment. This school is open to all children regardless of economic status, social background, religion, or academic ability. By adopting the concept of a "0 rupiah school," Gajahwong School eliminates the financial barrier that has been the main obstacle to accessing education. Children who were previously prevented from attending school due to lack of funds now have the opportunity to learn to recognize letters, read, write, and count in an inclusive and supportive environment. Overall, the challenges of access to education for marginalized children in Ledhok Timoho Village

³⁴Dewi Mahayati and Agus Ryanto, 'The Hemiplegic Shoulder Pain: A Descriptive Study', *FISIO MU: Physiotherapy Evidences*, 5.2 (2024), 169-74.

³⁵Kerri Evans, Jaime Perez-Aponte, and R McRoy, 'Without a Paddle: Barriers to School Enrollment Procedures for Immigrant Students and Families', *Education and Urban Society*, 52 (2020), 1283-1304, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013124519894976>.

³⁶Amanda Fernandes and others, 'Availability, Accessibility, and Use of Green Spaces and Cognitive Development in Primary School Children.', *Environmental Pollution*, 2023, 122143, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envpol.2023.122143>.

³⁷Analisis Yuridis and others, 'Legal Analysis of Access to Non-Formal Education for Street Children', *Journal of Insan Mulia Education*, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.59923/joinme.v3i1.414>.

³⁸F Prado-Galbarro and others, 'Early Childhood Development and Urban Environment in Mexico', *PLoS ONE*, 16 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0259946>.

³⁹Elizabeth Miller and others, 'Enhancing Early Language and Literacy Skills for Racial/Ethnic Minority Children with Low Incomes through a Randomized Clinical Trial: The Mediating Role of Cognitively Stimulating Parent-Child Interactions.', *Child Development*, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.14064>.

before the arrival of Gajahwong School reflected the failure of the national education system to reach the most vulnerable groups in society. This condition emphasizes the need for alternative educational intervention models that are more contextual, flexible, and sensitive to the socioeconomic realities of marginalized communities.⁴⁰

B. Empowering Marginalized Children Through Gajahwong School Education in Ledhok Timoho Village

The existence of Gajahwong School cannot be separated from the context of urban poverty that prevents children from obtaining formal education. According to Paulo Freire, in his work entitled "Pedagogy of the Oppressed," he argued that true education for oppressed groups should not be "banking," that is, simply pouring knowledge from the top down without considering the context and life experiences of students. Instead, education must be dialogic, contextual, and liberating. Education here is not simply the transfer of knowledge, but a practice of liberation that opens children's awareness of their rights and potential, and empowers them to escape the cycle of poverty and structural oppression.⁴¹ In this context, the presence of Gajahwong School can be understood as a critical response to the gaps in the formal education system that has failed to reach and serve marginalized children in Ledhok Timoho Village.

According to Edi Suharto (2005), in his book entitled "Building a Community, Empowering the People," empowerment means strength or power, derived from the word "power." Therefore, it can be concluded that empowerment is an effort or force aimed at helping vulnerable or weak groups.⁴² This form of empowerment can be in the form of motivation or support for resources, knowledge, skills and opportunities to increase the capacity and potential of a group.⁴³

In the context of empowering marginalized children, it is the process of providing access, opportunities, and skills to children from vulnerable groups to develop their full potential. This empowerment focuses not only on academic aspects but also on character development, life skills, and awareness of their rights as children.⁴⁴ In the context of marginalized children, empowerment becomes very crucial because they are often marginalized from the formal education system.⁴⁵ The presence of Gajahwong School is an alternative solution as an educational institution specifically designed to reach marginalized children in Ledhok Timoho Village.

This school provides learning opportunities for children who may not be able to access formal education due to various economic, social, or administrative barriers. Its flexible approach allows children to continue learning despite their limitations. One of Gajahwong School's strengths is its curriculum, which is not rigidly structured. Instead, the

⁴⁰Mursyid Itsnaini, 'Pemberdayaan Anak Jalanan Oleh Rumah Singgah Kawah Di Kelurahan Klitren, Gondokusuman, Yogyakarta', *Yogyakarta: Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga*, 2010.

⁴¹ Paulo Freire, 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed', in *Toward a Sociology of Education* (Routledge, 2020), pp. 374-86.

⁴²A Zippay, 'The Politics of Empowerment', *Social Work*, 40 (1995), 263-67, <https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/40.2.263>.

⁴³S Kruahong and others, 'Community Empowerment: A Concept Analysis.', *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jan.15613>.

⁴⁴Edi Suharto, 'Membangun Masyarakat Memberdayakan Rakyat', 2009.

⁴⁵Erin Azirha, 'Analisis Motivasi Anak Keluarga Marginal Yang Bersekolah Di Sekolah Menengah Atas Negeri 5 Bukit Tinggi Untuk Melanjutkan Pendidikan Ke Perguruan Tinggi' (Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau, 2023).

curriculum implemented by Gajahwong School is a combination of various curricula that reinforce local values, such as those on diversity, local wisdom, and a love of the environment and nature. Furthermore, there are curricula that utilize the surrounding community as a learning medium. There are also curricula that transform waste and used goods. Learning is designed according to the needs and conditions of marginalized children, combining academic education with practical skills that can be used in everyday life. The learning methods used are more participatory and fun, so children are more motivated to learn.⁴⁶

The uniqueness of Gajahwong School becomes even more pronounced when we see how it names and structures its class levels. Instead of using numbers or formal terms, this school chooses the metaphor of tree growth as a philosophical meaning of how education should take place: organic, gradual, mutually supporting, and always connected to the roots.⁴⁷

A child's journey at Gajahwong School begins in the Root Class, which is intended for children aged three to five. As the name suggests, this class is the deepest and most vital foundation. Held every Monday through Friday morning, the Root Class is more than just an ordinary early childhood education program; it is a space where children first learn to know themselves, build character, practice independence, and foster a love of the learning process itself. Like tree roots that work silently underground but support the entire life of the tree above, what is planted in the Root Class will be a crucial provision for a child's entire developmental journey.

When a child reaches the age of five to seven, they enter the Grass Class. Here, the spirit of learning begins to reach beyond themselves, like grass eagerly reaching for sunlight. Children begin to interact more actively with their peers and their surroundings, developing basic social and cognitive skills through structured play, group activities, and guided explorations by facilitators. This is the time when the social world begins to open up to them, and Gajahwong School ensures that door opens in a safe, joyful, and inquisitive way.

The next phase is the Branch and Trunk Class, a learning space for children aged seven to fifteen. Prioritized for alumni of the Root and Grass Class and children from the Ledhok Timoho area, this class marks a much more complex and challenging phase of learning. This is where Gajahwong School's pride and joy come into play: in one year, each child completes three projects, each touching on social, environmental, and other relevant themes. Children no longer simply learn to memorize; they learn to think critically, solve real-world problems, collaborate, and become agents of small change in their own communities. Like the branches that continue to branch and the trunk that grows stronger as a tree ages, children in this phase grow into increasingly independent, creative, and caring individuals.

But Gajahwong School's vision doesn't stop with children. This school understands a fundamental truth about education: that a child doesn't grow in a vacuum. They grow

⁴⁶Durratun Nashihah and others, 'Empowering Young Minds: Exploring Social Development And Environmental Awareness Through Recycled Waste Crafts In Pandanlandung Village Children's Forum', *Jurnal Masyarakat Madani Indonesia*, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.59025/sxq39h52>.

⁴⁷P Bakhshi, Steve Taff, and J Trani, 'A Child-Centred Care Approach to the Learning Process: Lessons Learned from a Participatory Intervention in Primary Schools in Afghanistan and Pakistan', *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*, 26 (2025), 306-15, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19452829.2025.2479033>.

within a family, within a community. That's why Gajahwong School also hosts Tree Class, a program aimed at parents and guardians. Through skills-building activities and shared spaces, parents are empowered to become active members of the educational ecosystem. Like a sturdy tree with a lush crown, Tree Class is the pinnacle of an entire, mutually supporting system. True education must reach the entire community, not just the children in the classroom.⁴⁸

With a population density of 72 families totaling over 300 people, Gajahwong School is only 10 x 10 meters, with a capacity of only 15 students each in the root and grass classes each morning. Despite this limited space, Gajahwong School is committed to monitoring the progress of its 8 students through weekend mentoring for other classes who are also attending formal schools outside. The school also involves the surrounding community, including parents, in the educational process. This collaborative approach creates a supportive and sustainable learning ecosystem, while empowering the community as a whole. The existence of Gajahwong School also increases public awareness of the importance of education, creates a more caring environment for children, and strengthens social cohesion through collaboration in educational activities.⁴⁹

At the community level, Gajahwong School also facilitates children's return to or entry into formal schooling. Many children are assisted with population documents, participating in the Planning for Package program, or transitioning to public or private schools. The school's role as a facilitator is key because it understands the bureaucratic obstacles often faced by marginalized families. In this context, the lives of marginalized children before the arrival of Gajahwong School can be understood as a state of structural powerlessness that has been passed down through generations. Children live in situations that limit the fulfillment of their basic rights, particularly the right to education. Overall, the empowerment of marginalized children through the community-based Gajahwong School in Ledhok Village has proven that education can be an effective instrument of social transformation.⁵⁰

In a broader context, Gajahwong School's work is clear evidence that poverty and limitations do not have to be an unchangeable fate. The lives of marginalized children before Gajahwong School can be interpreted as a condition of inherited structural powerlessness where closed access to education gives rise to lost opportunities, which in turn gives rise to poverty, which again closes access to education in a seemingly impenetrable cycle. Gajahwong School is present and inserts a small but sharp wedge into that cycle, enough to crack it, enough to give children a door to better possibilities.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research and discussion, it can be concluded that before the arrival of Gajahwong School, marginalized children in Ledhok Timoho Village lived in conditions

⁴⁸ Febri Kurnia Manoppo, Hasia Mamonto, and Friska Mamesah, 'Penanaman Nilai Moral Pada Anak Usia Dini Melalui Media Pembelajaran Tradisional Minahasa', *Montessori Jurnal Pendidikan Kristen Anak Usia Dini*, 3.1 (2022), 43–52.

⁴⁹ Mahayati, Parithustha, Winny Astuti, and Galing Yudana, "Faktor Prioritas Kesiapan Penanganan Kawasan Permukiman Kumuh (Studi Kasus: Bantaran Sungai Kali Anyar, Kota Surakarta)." *Region : Jurnal Pembangunan Wilayah Dan Perencanaan Partisipatif*, Vol. 19, No. 1, 2024, hlm. 127.

⁵⁰ Damarjati, I, "Pemberdayaan Masyarakat Untuk Penataan Permukiman Bantaran Sungai Winongo Oleh Forum Komunikasi Winongo Asri (FKWA): Studi RW 04 Sidomulyo Bener Tegalrejo Yogyakarta", Skripsi, Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, 2018.

of severe limitations. They faced uncertain family economic conditions, an unsupportive social environment, and administrative obstacles such as lack of birth certificates. As a result, many children had to work to support their parents, dropped out of school, and lost the opportunity to develop their potential. Education, which should be a basic right, was often considered a secondary need.

In this situation, Gajahwong School emerged as an alternative that addressed the limitations of the formal education system. With the concept of a "0 rupiah school," this school provides access to education without cost. Its curriculum is contextually designed, combining basic skills with life skills, social values, and local wisdom. The philosophy of tree growth used in the class names—Roots, Grass, Branches, Trunks, and Trees—symbolizes a continuous educational journey that involves the entire community, including parents. This school serves not only as a place of learning but also as a platform for empowerment. Children are encouraged to think critically, collaborate, and become agents of change in their environment. Parents are also involved through the Tree Class program, ensuring that education doesn't stop in the classroom but permeates community life. Despite limited space and capacity, Gajahwong School has succeeded in raising awareness of the importance of education, strengthening social solidarity, and creating opportunities to escape the cycle of poverty.

This research presents a novel aspect because it not only focuses on community based alternative education such as Gajahwong School, but also examines the conditions of marginalized children before and after the school's existence. Thus, this research is able to present a picture of the social and educational dynamics in Ledhok Timoho Village. Furthermore, this study emphasizes the role of the local community as the main driver in building inclusive education, not just beneficiaries, thus strengthening the bottom-up approach in developing alternative education. Although this study had limitations in collecting informants, both students and parents. This makes the data obtained less diverse and does not fully represent the overall experience of the community. Thus, Gajahwong School is not only an alternative educational institution, but also a social movement capable of transforming marginalization into opportunity.

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