



Initiative to bridge indigenous languages with English

Session aimed at building reading culture and fostering unity: Organiser

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KUCHING: In efforts to encourage the learning and usage of Sarawakian indigenous languages and English, a group of children took part in a reading session on literature and local stories recently.

The session, organised by NGO Heavenly Culture, World Peace, Restoration of Light (HWPL) Malaysia and the Salvation Army Kuching, was conducted by volunteer teachers.

It was held at the Salvation Army centre in Jalan Sekama on March 28.

HWPL Malaysia deputy general-director (Public Relations Department) Kelly Sim told *theSun* that the initiative supports Malaysia's National Reading Decade 2021-2030 initiative, led by the Education Ministry.

"The session we organised aligns with national efforts to build a strong reading culture and strengthen social unity.

"The inaugural reading session marked a meaningful step in supporting children's literacy development.

"Conducted in small groups, the session saw tutors guiding children through reading activities to build their vocabulary, pronunciation and confidence," she said.

She added that writers, educators and community members - especially those producing works in indigenous languages such as *Bidayuh*, *Iban* and other native dialects - were encouraged to share their stories with young readers.

"Within the initial session, noticeable improvements were observed as students became more comfortable and expressive in reading aloud, demonstrating the value of



Sim said HWPL welcomes collaboration with educational institutions, community organisations, authors and cultural groups that share a common vision of promoting literacy. - PIC COURTESY OF HWPL MALAYSIA

consistent guidance in early learning.

"Following this positive start, the session will be expanded to reach more communities, providing children with continued access to structured reading support.

"Beyond literacy, the initiative also aims to foster unity by creating inclusive spaces in which children from different backgrounds could learn and grow together.

"As a country rich in cultural diversity, such sessions would also promote the appreciation and preservation of local heritage."

Sharing her experience at the reading session, HWPL educator Christine Ting, 39, said it was designed to be interactive and engaging for young learners.

"The reading session also involved a power-point presentation.

"One of the stories we used was about a monkey who finds his laugh with the help of his animal friends.

"It includes fun words such 'Hello!' and 'Bang!', which the children can say out loud while practising," she said.

She added that visual aids and group activities were also incorporated to enhance learning.

"We used slides during the session and then provided printed materials for the children to practise together in groups.

"Stories that actively engage the students could help them expand their English vocabulary and build confidence."

Salvation Army volunteer Thian Swee Choo, 32, noted positive response from children who attended the session.

"It was very engaging. The children were divided into three groups, and each child had a chance to read different passages. There was also a warm-up video at the beginning to help them relax."

Sim said to further grow its impact, HWPL Malaysia welcomes collaboration with educational institutions, community organisations, authors and cultural groups that share a common vision of promoting literacy and cultural heritage.

"We hope that we could collaborate with more groups.

Through these partnerships and similar programmes, we are confident to reach more children and create meaningful learning opportunities across communities."

She also said, as highlighted by National Unity Minister Datuk Aaron Ago Dagang, that reading plays a key role in nation-building, as it "strengthens national unity through the sharing of knowledge, values and understanding among communities."

She added that reading, especially reading aloud, plays an important role in a child's development.

"It helps improve vocabulary and pronunciation while building confidence in communication.

"With proper guidance, children are better equipped to express themselves, engage with others and grow into confident individuals within their communities.

"By introducing children to books, be it in their mother tongue or English, the initiative supports both learning and the preservation of cultural identity."