

STRENGTHENING CHILDREN'S LITERACY AND CHARACTER AS A STRATEGIC STEP IN COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

PENGUATAN LITERASI DAN KARAKTER ANAK SEBAGAI LANGKAH STRATEGIS PEMBERDAYAAN MASYARAKAT

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Abstract

The Community Service Lecture (KKN) activity of MUHAMMADIYAH BONE UNIVERSITY was carried out at Banaran hamlet, Tegalsari sub-district, Weru district, Sukoharjo district , in 2024, aims to build a culture of creative literacy, improve character education, and community empowerment through a participatory approach. This program is designed in response to various challenges faced by the community, including low levels of digital literacy, high rates of stunting, and lack of empowerment that is still apathetic towards environmental cleanliness. In this program, various activities are implemented, such as digital literacy training for elementary school students, socialization about health and stunting prevention, character learning through TPQ Al-Quran education parks as well as signs and trash bins, socialization of the dangers of dengue fever and distribution of anti-mosquito spray as community empowerment. Digital literacy activities have succeeded in increasing students' and the community's understanding of the use of technology productively and safely. In addition, health socialization about stunting was attended by approximately 50 participants, where they were introduced to nutritious and healthy parenting patterns and the importance of routine check-ups for children to prevent stunting and the distribution of milk. Religious character education in religious teachings, so that children understand positive values. Signs and trash bins to always pay attention to public health. The dangers of dengue fever and the distribution of anti-mosquito spray in addition to providing education also provide solutions in preventing dengue fever mosquitoes. Through this KKN activity, it is proven that a community service approach based on local needs and close collaboration between stakeholders can create sustainable change. This program also provides valuable experience for students in applying their knowledge and skills in the real world, as well as increasing their capacity as future leaders.

INTRODUCTION

Community empowerment is a strategic process that aims to increase the ability, independence, and active participation of communities in improving their standard of living and quality of life. This empowerment is very important, especially in environments that have limited access to educational resources and skills development. One of the effective steps in community empowerment is through strengthening literacy in children and character education, which is expected to be a foundation for the younger generation to face increasingly complex global challenges. Strengthening literacy at the village level can help overcome various social and economic challenges faced by local communities. (Mustoip et al. 2024) .

In this context, literacy is no longer limited to basic reading, writing, and arithmetic skills, but also includes digital literacy, information literacy, and cultural literacy. Digital literacy, for example, is very important in today's technological era, where children need to understand how to use technology wisely and productively. Information literacy is also crucial so that children are able to filter the

information they receive, identify valid sources, and are not easily influenced by fake news or misinformation. In addition, cultural literacy helps children understand cultural diversity and build an attitude of tolerance towards differences, which is very relevant in a pluralistic society. Reading skills are the basis for children to master various fields of study. (diawaitou 2024) .

Along with strengthening literacy, character education is also an important pillar in building a strong society. Character education aims to form positive attitudes, behaviors, and values in children, which will later become the basis for them to act in society. Values such as honesty, responsibility, discipline, cooperation , and social concern are some of the aspects emphasized in character education. By having a strong character, children will not only become intelligent individuals, but also have integrity and have the ability to contribute positively to their social environment. The implications support efforts to improve the quality of education towards a vision of the future supported by a generation that excels in character and intellectually. (hartinah et al. 2024)

Community empowerment efforts through literacy and character education programs can have a major impact, both in the short and long term. In the short term, this program can provide children with a basic understanding of the importance of literacy and strong character, as well as equip them with the skills needed in everyday life. In the long term, this program is expected to be able to create a young generation that is independent, competitive, and has adequate life skills to face the dynamics of social and economic change.

The challenges in developing literacy and character education are certainly not few. Some of them include lack of access to quality reading materials, limited teaching staff who have a deep understanding of literacy and character education, and minimal facilities that support an interactive and enjoyable learning process. However, through a systematic approach and collaboration with various parties, these challenges can be overcome gradually. The involvement of government, educational institutions, community organizations, and families is very important to ensure that this literacy and character education program can run sustainably and have a broad impact. Strengthening literacy, which is a key strategy in increasing the capacity of individuals and community groups to face challenges in the increasingly complex information era. (Regita Pinkan Syahrani and Arimurti Kriswibowo 2024) .

In today's era of globalization and digitalization, children need more than just academic education. They need to be equipped with critical thinking skills, communication skills, and strong ethical and social awareness. By strengthening literacy and character from an early age, we provide them with a solid foundation to face an increasingly competitive and dynamic world. Therefore, community empowerment programs that focus on strengthening literacy in children and character education are not only relevant, but also urgent to implement.

Through this program, it is hoped that children and young generations in the community can develop into individuals who are not only intellectually intelligent, but also emotionally and socially mature. They will be a generation that is ready to face the future, able to contribute to the progress of society, and uphold humanitarian values.

Method

The implementation of KKN is a program implemented by students of Muhammadiyah University of Bone in Banaran Hamlet , Tegalsari Village, Weru District, Sukoharjo Regency . It is carried out through several stages: preparation, implementation, and program evaluation. This program consists of several stages, namely:

1. Preparation Stage

- Identification of community needs : Before implementing the program, the KKN team conducted observations and discussions with village officials and community leaders to identify the main needs of the community in Bugel Hamlet.
- Program design and work plan : Based on the identification results, the team prepared a work program that focused on three main themes: reading and writing literacy, character education, and community empowerment.

- Coordination with stakeholders : The KKN team coordinates with village officials, schools, and related parties to design schedules, locations, and forms of activities to suit the conditions and needs of the local community. The descriptive method is very appropriate to be used to investigate and describe the condition of the community or environment that is the focus of the service. (lollotery et al. 2023)
2. Implementation stage
The program is implemented in several thematic activities as follows:
 - Literacy reading and writing
Activities : Is the knowledge and ability to read, write, search, browse, process, and understand information. Reading and writing literacy can help develop understanding and potential, and participate in the social environment.
 - Character education :
Socialization at school : Conducting socialization at school regarding character values such as discipline, honesty, cooperation , and responsibility. Socialization methods can be done through inspirational stories and group discussions.
Extracurricular : Holding joint gymnastics activities and competitions to build a sense of togetherness and leadership among students. This activity aims to integrate character education through fun physical activities.
 - Community empowerment :
Training on making anti-mosquito spray from lemongrass : this program aims to provide new skills to the community about making anti-mosquito spray from natural ingredients, namely lemongrass and lime leaves, which are easy to obtain and safer.
Stunting socialization : conducting counseling on stunting and its prevention, which includes understanding child nutrition, healthy eating patterns, and the importance of health care for pregnant women. This approach helps increase public awareness of child health and development.
 3. Evaluation stage
Program evaluation : The KKN team conducted a program evaluation with village officials and activity participants to measure the effectiveness and success of the program that had been implemented.
Reports and documentation : The results of the evaluation and documentation of the implementation of KKN are summarized in a final report submitted to the village and educational institutions as a form of accountability and learning for future activities.
 4. Participatory and collaborative approach
Community involvement : The KKN program is implemented with a participatory approach, where the community, village officials, and students collaborate to ensure the sustainability of the program. Each activity is designed so that it can be continued independently by the community after the KKN team completes the program.
Sustainability of the program : The programs implemented are developed with the aim that their benefits can continue to be felt by the community. Activities such as skills training and health education are expected to be able to increase community independence in the long term.

Results and Discussion

Overview of the service location:

Banaran hamlet is one of 10 hamlets in Tegalsari sub-district, Weru district, Sukoharjo regency. The area of 3,35 km Tegalsari sub-district is divided into 45 RT and 10 RW. The boundaries of Tegalsari sub-district are, to the north Tawang village and Klaten regency, to the east Weru village and Tawang village, to the south Karangtengah village and Karakan village, to the west Grogol village and Klaten regency.

While the demographic population of Tegalsari Village has a population of ± 3,892 people, the condition of toddlers, Posyandu activities in each hamlet continue to run regularly according to

schedule, monitoring of the weight of babies and toddlers and their nutritional equipment such as PMT (provision of additional food) has been carried out well even though there are still a few obstacles, teenagers in Tegalsari Village, especially in Banaran Hamlet are not active and productive. So that in youth organizational activities (Karang Taruna) it does not run actively, so that the awareness of organizing each teenager in Banaran Hamlet is relatively lacking, and adults in general, the community in Tegalsari Village, especially adults, mostly work as farmers and ranchers, some work as civil servants (PNS)

Identification of service locations

Tegalsari Village is one of the villages that is predominantly livestock and farmers, but there is still a lack of public awareness about the entrepreneurial spirit that can support the economic progress of the Tegalsari Village community. Great entrepreneurs have the ability to change the way a person lives and works. If successful, the innovations they develop can improve the standard of living and they can also create jobs and contribute to economic growth. Based on our observations, the identification of problems such as, many people migrate to work outside the city, lack of teachers for TPQ so that these activities are less effective. Socialization about health in Banaran Hamlet, the need for education to improve the quality of education for children in Banaran Hamlet and people who do not pay much attention to proper waste disposal, so that it can become a breeding ground for mosquitoes that cause dengue fever.

All of the above if not immediately initiated does not rule out the possibility that it will result in the behavior or habits of local residents will be difficult to develop. However, on the contrary, if the programs aimed at dealing with the above problems are immediately realized, the welfare of residents will increase and create a new good lifestyle. The above program is expected not only to be implemented when there is KKN but also to be made a routine agenda or continued by residents and village officials. In addition, it is expected to increase Tegalsari resources.

Results of devotion

KKN activities in Bugel Hamlet, Banaran Hamlet, Tegalsari Village, Weru District, Sukoharjo Regency. Which was implemented successfully achieved several significant results in the fields of literacy, health, and community economic empowerment. Based on the evaluation conducted during the program, the following are the main results of this KKN activity:

1. Improving literacy in children.

Early literacy refers to the set of skills and knowledge a child acquires in the period before formal instruction in reading and writing. To attract students' attention in early literacy, teachers must be able to create a pleasant learning atmosphere so that students do not realize that they are learning. Because if the learning process that takes place is in the form of providing material or cramming, according to adults it is considered important and must be known by children, then this is contrary to the psychological condition of early childhood. (mardiyah, siahaan, and budirahayu 2020)

Therefore, literacy activities for children are carried out in Banaran Hamlet, Tegalsari Village, Weru District, Sukoharjo Regency. Especially for school students and the general public, literacy activities are carried out at SDN 3 Tegalsari and at the KKN post which we call the smart house. Includes various interesting and interactive approaches so that children feel happy while learning. This literacy is carried out as well as possible to create a fun and stimulating learning atmosphere and train children to use the internet wisely and introduce educational applications. This activity aims to improve children's skills in using technology safely. So that children do not feel that they are "learning" formally, but rather more like playing while learning. This literacy activity is expected to build a strong interest and attachment to literacy activities from an early age.

To overcome the limited access to quality books, the SDN 3 Tegalsari library rivalry is one of the efforts to build enjoyable literacy for children, the library rivalry program is

carried out for two days by tidying up story books, fairy tales, textbooks, and other non-fiction readings. The library rivalry is made in such a way that it can be of interest to children, who are enthusiastic about choosing books according to their interests.



Figure I Literacy process in smart schools and homes.

The literacy program in Banaran Hamlet and SDN 3 Tegalsari has had a positive impact on the development of children's literacy skills in the area. Children involved in literacy activities show a higher interest in reading, hopefully in the future, there is great hope for this literacy program to develop more widely and involve more resources. This activity is expected to be an example for other areas in Sukoharjo Regency to improve literacy and form a society with broad knowledge and strong character.

2. Health socialization and stunting prevention.

Stunting is a condition of stunted physical growth and brain development in children due to long-term malnutrition, especially in the first 1,000 days of life. In Indonesia, the problem of stunting is still a major challenge, with many areas where stunting rates are still high. Tegalsari Village, which is one of the villages in Indonesia, is also not free from this problem. To overcome the problem of stunting, it is important to carry out socialization and education to the community about the importance of good nutrition and proper parenting for children because recent studies show that stunted children are related to poor school achievement and low levels of education (Fatriansyah et al. 2024). This socialization is expected to build public awareness about the dangers of stunting and preventive measures.



Figure II Process of socialization of stunting

The main objective of health socialization and stunting prevention movements in the Tegalsari village hall and the hamlet head's house is to increase knowledge to provide the community with an understanding of stunting, the factors that cause it, and how to prevent it, as well as education on nutrition patterns. foster children to teach healthy and nutritious parenting patterns, as well as the importance of regular health checks for children, stunting prevention : disseminating information about ways that

can be applied in everyday life to reduce the risk of stunting, such as exclusive breastfeeding, providing nutritious food, and a clean and healthy environment, as well as community empowerment to make people more actively involved in the stunting prevention movement at the village level. With this socialization, it is hoped that Tegalsari villagers will better understand how important it is to get adequate nutritional intake from an early age, the role of parents is to supervise and educate their children in a good way. To support children's health, the environment must be clean. the ability to make better decisions about children's food and health and identify signs of stunting.

3. Character education (Religious in religious teachings).

Character education refers to efforts to develop positive aspects within a person, such as morality, honesty, discipline, responsibility, and concern for others. This education is oriented towards the formation of individuals who are not only intelligent, but also good in their behavior, decisions, and social interactions. Religious education is an important part of character education. Religious teachings provide guidelines for life that include moral, ethical and spiritual teachings that can shape an individual's character. Every religion has basic values that teach goodness, honesty, compassion, peace, and justice, all of which are very important in the formation of human character. One concrete implementation of the principle of religious moderation is the effort to build and maintain village boundary gates that represent the religious diversity that exists in a village. (Supardi et al. 2023) .



Figure III TPQ learning process

In Islam , character education focuses on teaching tauhid (the oneness of God), noble morals, and social responsibility. This program teaches children as best as possible how important it is to have good character, empathize with others, maintain relationships with God (habluminallah) and with fellow human beings (habluminannas), and social responsibility to the community, in helping TPQ teaching by learning to read the Qur'an every Sunday and Monday students help teach in the youth organization because there is a lack of teaching staff. So we coordinate with the head of the youth organization to form a mosque youth association (irmas) with the aim that this activity will continue whether or not there is a KKN program in order to provide good benefits for the younger siblings.

4. Increasing facilities and infrastructure and maintaining environmental health and creating a safe environment for the community.

▪ Signs and trash bins

The problem of waste has often been discussed in various fields which is a complicated problem for people who are less concerned and less sensitive to environmental pollution (di et al. 2023) . The installation of signs or information boards in public areas can provide education to the public about order and maintaining cleanliness. This sign can contain information about the importance

of disposing of waste in its place, an invitation to protect the environment, or an appeal to always maintain cleanliness while providing sufficient and separate trash bins (organic, inorganic, and B3 waste) is an important step to control waste in public areas. Easily accessible trash bins can reduce littering with the hope of encouraging residents to be disciplined in disposing of waste and sorting waste. This helps maintain environmental cleanliness, prevents odors, and avoids the accumulation of waste that can become a breeding ground for mosquitoes. Therefore, the sign and trash bin program is in the Banaran hamlet area. The lack of public attention to proper waste disposal is why we are providing this program to address the problem of indiscriminate waste disposal. This program is accompanied by Mr. Purnomo as the head of Banaran Hamlet. " This trash can is very useful for the Banaran Hamlet community because people often throw trash in the river," said Mr. Purnomo.



Figure IV Process of signs and trash bins

- Socialization of the dangers of dengue fever and distribution of anti-mosquito spray.

This program aims to provide education to the public about the dangers of dengue fever mosquitoes (DBD) is a disease caused by dengue virus infection transmitted by the *aedes aegypti* mosquito, (kristanti et al. 2024) and the distribution of anti-mosquito spray. This spray is an alternative to mosquito repellent lotion because most lotions can cause skin irritation. The series of events took place without any obstacles, the community was very enthusiastic about paying attention to the presentation of the material and actively asking questions. This program was attended by the head of the hamlet, the head of the RT / RW Dukuh Bugel. "This mosquito repellent spray will definitely be very useful for the community, we would like to thank the KKN students who have provided an explanation of how to make this spray and it is very easy to make, the community can definitely make it independently at home." Said Mr. Purnomo. The spray we made uses ingredients that are very easy to find, namely water, lime leaves and lemongrass stalks.



Figure V Socialization process the dangers of dengue fever and making anti-mosquito spray .

Conclusion

Real work lecture activities (KKN) MUHAMMADIYAH UNIVERSITY OF BONE Bone Regency Jln. Abu Dg. Pasolong. Aiming for community empowerment through strengthening children's literacy and character as a strategic step in community empowerment can be seen in Figure I showing the literacy process in children at SDN 3 Tegalsari school and at the KKN POSKO. Figure II shows the process of socializing stunting in children in order to create healthy children and avoid stunting. Figure III shows the learning process of the Al-Quran education park which is usually called TPQ where children learn the hijayah letters and positive values such as discipline, responsibility and honesty. Figure VI the process of the sign and trash can program so that people pay attention to disposing of garbage properly and in Figure V the process of socializing the dangers of dengue fever and making anti-mosquito spray. Thus, literacy and character education programs for children are long-term investments that can change the lives of society as a whole, creating a more prosperous, productive and empowered society.

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