

Accelerating Children's Literacy Competence at Kalen Village through Assistance of Literacy-Based Activities

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ABSTRACT

Indonesian children's literacy competencies are still a problem. To accelerate the development of the competence, the community service team of Unisda implemented assistance to exemplify copious literacy-based activities both in school and in the community at Kalen village where the problem of the inappropriateness of literacy-based practices, and the unavailability of a literacy support environment were found. The program was targeted to children of elementary school age of Kalen Village, Lamongan, East Java, Indonesia. Several planned programs were accomplished through three phases; preparation that included identifying community problems and deciding on offered solutions, implementation that covers the execution of the planned programs in twelve weeks, and evaluation. To evaluate the activities, an analysis of observation, interview, and a survey was conducted qualitatively. The result indicated that three major programs were evidenced to accelerate children's literacy competence. The success of the program, therefore, was urgently suggested to be a continuous program to be arranged by the village government.

Keywords: children, literacy competence, literacy-based activities

1. INTRODUCTION

The National Literacy Movement (GLN) is a movement launched by the Indonesian government in 2016 to awaken and develop the literacy competencies of Indonesian society. Further movement in educational scope was also initiated by the Ministry of Education and Culture (Kemendikbud) in the School Literacy Movement (GLS). Both movements generate challenges for the nation's development to prepare generations who are qualified for 21st-century competence that is adaptable to the current world advancement. Although the government has initiated GLN and GLS in 2016, the literacy issue in Indonesia is still critical. In 2019, Indonesia is still one of the ten countries with low literacy levels based on the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) survey. Additional action taken by the

government was through the National Literacy Cultivation Roadmap as a guide to applying literacy programs for communities, and non-governmental organizations (**Tabroni et al., 2022**). Therefore, investigating literacy is still a vital issue in Indonesia.

To address the challenges of the 21st century was to equip Indonesian society with virtuous literacy competencies through school in a formal environment and social activities in a non-formal environment from basic to high levels. In addition to school activities as one of the pillars of education that acts as a foundation for developing the students' literacy competencies, the society and community activities must also be based on literacy-based practices with the purpose of accelerating the development of society and community literacy competencies. In an attempt to motivate children to read, reading-based activities must be placed not only in school but also in places where the children are there (**Andina, 2016**). Furthermore, to support children's literacy competencies, the two atmospheres that must be literacy sociable are home and social environments (**Roberts et al., 2005**). Hereafter, except for school, literacy support activities must also be centered in the society and community for children.

To level up literacy competence and literate generations can be initiated through empowering virtuous literacy-based practices and activities as well as a sufficient and appropriate literacy support environment. Several worthy literacy-based practices and activities for children can be started to enhance children's literacy competence. One of the practices to enhance children's literacy competencies is through stimuli by providing a bundle of literacy activities and media that can be implemented either for children or as socialization for their parents (**Hapsari et al., 2017**). Furthermore, some activities to improve literacy competence can be implemented through various activities such as joint writing-reading stories, spontaneous writing, discussing story material, providing several reading books, reading and writing through media like flashcards, (**Puranik et al., 2018**), doing literacy-based games like spelling bee and video games (**Puranik et al., 2018; Stufft, 2018**), providing visual literacy aid like images or video (**Kędra & Žakevičiūtė, 2019**) and digital literacy activities by using a computer or mobile phone (**Kumpulainen et al., 2020**). Accordingly, the scope of literacy does not only focus on reading and writing but is also related to children's everyday life. Therefore, developing children's literacy competence is vigorous.

Implementing literacy-based activities for children either in school, at home, or in a community is somehow complicated. Some problems faced by elementary school teachers, governments at a low level like a village, and parents in enhancing children's literacy competencies cover the inappropriateness of literacy-based practices and activities, unavailability of a literacy support environment, and dissimilarities of parents' literacy level (**Kharizmi, 2015**). Those school, environment, and home problems influenced children's literacy competence which was still estimated at a low level. Children in Kalen village are also facing the problem of a lower level of literacy competencies. The problems found in Kalen village are also in accordance with two problems found by Kharizmi (**2015**).

In general, the Kalen Village is located at Kedungpring Sub-District, Lamongan District, East Java Province, Indonesia. As an agricultural village, the majority of Kalen Villagers make a living as farmers. In 2016, the economic growth of the Village began to show significant graphics after the establishment of several companies located in Kalen. The existence of these companies affected the local transmigration process which was easily enhanced the economic development of the village through several types of businesses ranging from trading, personal services, financial services or cooperatives, public services, etc. The education level of majority of the villagers were senior high school graduates (38%) followed by university graduates

(32%). Numerous education services both formal schools and non-formal institutions are in Kalen Village. Even, there are three elementary schools in the village. However, the preliminary study showed that the level of literacy awareness and competencies of children in Kalen village was considered low. Only few of them are aware of the importance of literacy. Also, unavailability of a literacy support environment and absence of concrete action from the village government were the major environmental problem found. Moreover, the village government has not planned and offered any literacy program for the children or the community.

According to the issues above and attempting to overcome the abovementioned problems, the community service of Unisda has planned to arrange some activities to provide literacy-based activities suitable to children in Kalen village by considering today's digital-age literacy or so-called multiliteracies. The multiliteracies include interpreting literacy from numerous standpoints; basic literacy, science literacy, economic literacy, technological literacy, visual literacy, and information literacy (**Metiri, 2003 as cited in Kharizmi, 2015**). Among the six multiliteracies, this community service program focused on four of them, basic literacy, technological literacy, visual literacy, and information literacy. Therefore, this community service was aimed at accelerating children's literacy competence through copious planned literacy-based activities both in school and in the community at Kalen village based on four multiliteracies. The program is expected to be able not only to give assistance to children to enhance their literacy competencies but also to contribute to the initial literacy practices realizing Kalen village as a literate village.

2. METHOD

The program was executed in the form of community assistance at Kalen Village regarding literacy issues for twelve weeks. The target participants of this community service program were children of elementary school age in Kalen Village. The program was held toward fourth grade students in three elementary schools in Kalen Village; MI Muhammadiyah Kalen, SDN Kalen and MI Empat Lima Kalen and the community area of neighbourhood of *Rukun Warga* (RW) 1 within Kalen Village. The methods performed within the assistance were demonstration and hands-on practices. Three main phases were accomplished to implement the current community service program; preparation, implementation, and evaluation. The preparation phase was initiated by identifying community problems in Kalen Village by coordination with the Head of Kalen village regarding the certain parties to initial interview about the literacy competence at Kalen community. The result of the initial interview indicated that the literacy practices and activities in Kalen were inappropriate and the environment to support the literacy atmosphere was mostly unavailable.

After several problems were identified, the team of the community service program arranged some potential literacy-based programs and activities to implement for the ensuing weeks. After all, the prearranged programs were all consulted and validated by the expert, then another coordination with the village head and related parties proceeded for technical implementation. Afterward, the implementation phase covers the accomplishment of the three prearranged programs. The three programs were smart student's home, out-class learning, and classroom literacy. Before the implementation commenced, a pre-test to measure the children's initial level of literacy competence was distributed to the participant through the opening event of the smart student's home program. The questions included in the tests cover the four multiliteracies. Upon the completion of the survey, the three programs were implemented simultaneously. The smart student's home program applied two activities; fun learning, and computer training activity, while the out-class learning program was executed

through media use or games activity. In addition, as the last program, the classroom literacy program was realized in literacy corners and group learning activities.

In the last phase, the evaluation was performed among the community service team and children by doing observation, interview and survey. The observation was done throughout the activities of the program by note-taking, while a focus-group interview was conducted to gain deeper information regarding the observation result. After all, similar tests to measure the children's final level of literacy competence were distributed to the participant with identical questions as the previous ones. To evaluate the overall activities within each program, an analysis of results of observation, interview, and a survey was conducted qualitatively through a triangulation process reflecting the success and obstacles of each of the activities implemented by the community service team to further the program continuation.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of a pre-test measuring the children's initial level of literacy competence showed that 70% of children have a low level of literacy competence since they got scores below 50. Thirty percent of them were categorized as having a moderate level of literacy competence whose score was below 70.

The two found problems concerning children's literacy competence at Kalen Village were the literacy practices and activities in Kalen were inappropriate and the environment to support the literacy atmosphere was unavailable. Both problems influenced greatly children's low level of literacy competence. Therefore, to overcome the problems, three programs of this community service assistance were selected. After coordinating with relevant parties, community service assistance was commenced. Each of the programs was described respectively as below.

3.1 Smart student's home

The first program was a smart student's home applied in one of the learning homes at Kalen Village. The assistance of this program was carried in fun learning and computer training activity. A learning process that is fun can shape children's inspirational characters (**Bavi, 2018**). Through customizing a fun atmosphere during learning, children were provided the chance to sightsee and practice new lessons to boost the learning experience where they learn independently to process the knowledge and apply the novel lesson. One of the ways to implement fun learning depicted in Figure 1 was through physical movement activities.



Figure 1. Demonstration fun learning activity

In Figure 1, the children learn English vocabulary through movement. The activity covers basic literacy where English vocabulary is used to enhance children's knowledge. The observation showed that children's English vocabulary was improved through learning and moving activities in fun learning carried out in the smart student's home program. They look enthusiastic and excited with vocabulary guessing and pronunciation challenges. One of the children in the interview session confessed that they enjoyed learning by movement, and were excited to wait for other activities in learning, movement, and playing which is fun.

Technology is one of the prominent tools which is undeniably vital in today's digital era with the advancement of Information and communication technologies (ICT). Students must adapt to this era by mastering related skills and competencies to use technologies as early as possible. Nevertheless, countless children at Kalen have no adequate technology literacy competence, especially in computer use. Therefore, aiming at building and enhancing the technology literacy of children at Kalen the community service team accomplished computer training for children.



Figure 2. Demonstration and practices of computer training

The computer training was carried out four times in four weeks within two hours of demonstration and hands-on practice of different materials; how to operate a computer, how to write in Microsoft Office Word, and how to master the computer keyboard. The training was a combination of technological and visual literacy as shown in figure 2. The technological literacy in this computer training focuses on the technical ways a computer works and can be used in writing through particular software, Microsoft Office Word. Moreover, visual literacy in the computer training program concerns the ability to use images from technological media to enhance written communication. The training results generated that children's technology and visual literacy were proved to enhance significantly by 45% where the average pre-test score was 35 and the average post-test score was 80. The enhancement of children's computer knowledge and practice accords with Meitri's **(2003 as cited in Kharizmi, 2015)** enlightenment on the improvement of particular skills from technological and visual training.

3.2 Out-class learning

Another program was out-class learning accomplished in elementary school at Kalen village. This program was applied by assistance in demonstration and practices. Learning out of class was detected in interview results to be rarely implemented in elementary school at Kalen village. Most students admitted that teaching and learning are solely located in the classroom. Therefore, out-class learning was demonstrated by the team using media or physical

movement in a game for four weeks. One of the demonstration phases made by the team can be seen in Figure 3.



Figure 3. Team demonstration of out-class learning using media in SDN Kalen

Figure 3 demonstrated that turning in-class learning into out-class learning could be done by equipping media to enhance students' involvement. The use of media is visual and information literacy. The visual literacy practices enabled students to use images from media provided to enhance learning, while information literacy allowed them to identify and use information from media as learning resources. The ability to identify and use the information on the media to improve students learning is in line with the visual and information literacy purposes predicted by Meitri **(2003 as cited in Kharizmi, 2015)**. In light of the observation result of out-class learning, students were more enthusiastic to learn the subject. They stated that they felt obtaining a new atmosphere of learning during out-class learning.



Figure 4. School teacher practice in out-class learning in MI Empat Lima Kalen

In the practice phase, the teacher confirmed the acceptability of out-class learning to enhance students' ability as shown in figure 4. The teacher recognized the students' improved scores after doing out-class learning. The score improvement made after out-class learning supported Gunayanti et al **(2015)** who believed in students' competencies development, especially toward their cognitive competence **(Mygind, 2007)**. In other words, providing students with an enjoyable atmosphere throughout class learning can enhance students' cognitive ability since they were facilitated by visual and information literacy through media use or games.

3.3 Classroom literacy

The last assistance program was classroom literacy activities carried out in four weeks. This program is carried out by providing students with several Indonesian and English literacy practices in the corner of the classroom called literacy corner. The literacy corner was previously unavailable so it is a new environment for them. The portrayal of one literacy corner was as shown in Figure 5 below.



Figure 5. One of the literacy corners in the classroom

The literacy corner as shown in Figure 5 was ornamented by various information literacy regarding Indonesian and English language vocabularies as basic literacy (**Metiri, 2003 as cited in Kharizmi, 2015**). Before the vocabulary attachment on the wall, a pre-test of each week's vocabulary was performed to know their understanding of the following vocabulary to attach. The results demonstrated that the questions correctly answered were in week 1 only 15%, week 2 20%, week 30%, and week 4 10%. As the vocabulary was attached and exposed on the wall, students can read it written in two languages. The two languages English as an international language and Indonesian as a national one were required as it functions to prepare students facing the digital age where most information was delivered in English. The provided vocabulary in both English and Indonesian has gained more students' attention to ask the teacher or discover the meaning. The vocabulary was changed every week. Within a week, another activity implemented in the literacy corner was group learning by discussing the vocabulary of the week as shown in Figure 6.



Figure 6. Group learning in the classroom literacy corner of MI Muhammadiyah Kalen

The vocabulary attached to the wall of the literacy corner was a stimulating environment to further confirm in the group learning activity through reading related text and spontaneous writing using the vocabulary of the week. Significant life competencies that contribute actively to contemporary society are reading and writing (Tiede et al., 2022). The material in the reading discussed was vocabulary written during the week. Four changes of vocabulary

stimulation were completed in four weeks; the environment, the emotions, the body parts, and the household appliances. Before the changes were made, the post-test was performed to know whether there is an improved vocabulary mastery. The results indicated that students' correct answers were improved meaningfully. The percentage of correctly answering the question in week 1 was 80%, week 2 was 85%, week 3 was 80%, and week 4 was 75%. The enhancement generated the success of the literacy corner stimulus.

After all, the results of a post-test measuring the children's final level of literacy competence showed that 80% of children's literacy scores have improved above 70 classified as having a moderate level of literacy competence. Of the children classified as low level of literacy competence, only 20% of them scored below 50.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results of the pre-test, 70% of students have literacy test scores below 50 considered as low. The current community service program was a community learning assistance at Kalen Village regarding literacy issues for twelve weeks. The learning assistance was divided into three programs; the smart student's home program in fun learning, and computer training activity, the out-class learning program through media use or games activity, and the classroom literacy program in literacy corners and group learning activities. The results of this community service program found that the percentage of children with a low level of literacy competence after the community service activities decreased. Only 20% of children got scores below 50.

It is recommended that the success of either smart students' home, out-class learning, or classroom literacy to accelerate children's literacy must be sustained by the relevant parties under the instruction and control of the village government. As a follow-up to this community service activity, the next program is strived to enhance children's literacy by involving their parents. The parent's involvement is a vital matter sighted that the children first learning environment is their family as a supportive element to the development process at the next phases.

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