



Strengthening Basic Literacy for Early Childhood through Community Service Programs at Kindergarten Bunda, Kanali Village, Totikum South District

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ABSTRAK

Basic literacy is an important foundation for the cognitive and social development of early childhood. The low literacy skills of children in remote areas, including at Kindergarten Bunda, Kanali Village, South Totikum District, is a problem that requires serious attention. The purpose of this community service activity is to improve basic literacy skills including letter recognition, early reading, and simple writing for 21 students at Kindergarten Bunda through a fun and contextual play-while-learning method. The methods used include play-based learning approaches, the use of educational visual media, and teacher training in developing literacy teaching materials appropriate for early childhood needs. The results of the activity showed a significant increase in letter recognition ability by 78%, initial syllable reading ability by 65%, and the ability to write one's own name by 71% from a total of 21 students. The conclusion of this activity shows that a literacy-based community service program with a play approach is effective in improving basic literacy skills of early childhood students at Kindergarten Bunda, Kanali Village

INTRODUCTION

Basic literacy is one of the fundamental competencies that children must master from an early age to prepare them for their future social life and formal education. Literacy skills acquired in early childhood form a solid foundation for learning in subsequent educational levels (Susanto, 2021). The importance of early childhood literacy is also emphasized in a study by Wahyuni and Pratiwi, which states that children who possess strong literacy skills from an early age have a greater chance of excelling in elementary school and beyond (Pratiwi, 2020).

Based on the results of observations and preliminary interviews conducted in January 2025 at Bunda Kindergarten in Kanali Village, South Totikum Subdistrict, Banggai Islands Regency, it was found that out of 21 enrolled students, approximately 76% (16 children) were not yet able to recognize all letters of the alphabet, 81% (17 children) were not yet able to read simple syllables, and 67% (14 children) were not yet able to write their own names. This situation falls far below the developmental standards for early childhood, as children should already be beginning to acquire basic literacy skills by the age of 5–6 years (Nurhasanah, 2020).

Kanali Village is located in the Totikum Selatan Subdistrict, Banggai Kepulauan Regency, Central Sulawesi Province. Geographically, the village is quite remote with limited road access, making the distribution of educational resources—including qualified teachers and adequate teaching materials—a significant challenge. According to the 2025 village profile data, the population of Kanali Village is over 430 people, with the majority earning a living as fishermen and farmers. The educational level of the students' parents is predominantly at the junior high school (52%) and elementary school (30%) levels, meaning that literacy support from the family environment remains very limited.

Bunda Kanali Village Kindergarten has 1 principal who also serves as a classroom teacher, 2 assistant teachers, and a total of 21 students divided into Group A (ages 4–5) with 9 children and Group B (ages 5–6) with 12 children. School facilities and infrastructure remain very limited, consisting of a single 6x8-meter classroom, no library, and very limited literacy teaching materials. These conditions align with findings indicating that schools in remote areas generally face facility constraints that impact the low quality of early childhood literacy education (Rakimahwati, 2019).

Based on these issues, the community service team formulated the following research questions: (1) How can we improve the basic literacy skills of the children at Bunda Kindergarten through a fun, play-based approach? (2) How can we enhance teachers' competencies in developing effective literacy learning materials and strategies? The objective of this community service activity is to improve the basic literacy skills of students at Bunda Kindergarten in Kanali Village, which include letter recognition, early reading, and simple writing, as well as to enhance teachers' capacity in managing play-based literacy instruction. Literacy intervention programs designed to fit the local context and

incorporating a play-based approach have proven effective in boosting the interest and literacy skills of young children (Hidayat, 2021).

IMPLEMENTATION AND METHOD

This community service activity was conducted at Bunda Kindergarten in Kanali Village, Totikum Selatan Subdistrict, Banggai Kepulauan Regency, Central Sulawesi Province. The target audience for this activity was all 21 students at Bunda Kindergarten, consisting of 9 children in Group A (ages 4–5) and 12 children in Group B (ages 5–6). In addition to the students, this activity also involved the principal and two teachers as partners in the implementation and sustainability of the program.

Based on these issues, the community service team formulated the following research questions: (1) How can we improve the basic literacy skills of the children at Bunda Kindergarten through a fun, play-based approach? (2) How can we enhance teachers' competencies in developing effective literacy learning materials and strategies? The objective of this community service activity is to improve the basic literacy skills of students at Bunda Kindergarten in Kanali Village, which include letter recognition, early reading, and simple writing, as well as to enhance teachers' capacity in managing play-based literacy instruction. Literacy intervention programs designed to fit the local context and incorporating a play-based approach have proven effective in boosting the interest and literacy skills of young children (Hidayat, 2021).

The learning materials used include: (1) colorful letter cards measuring 10x10 cm; (2) picture flashcards featuring images of objects familiar to children; (3) locally-based picture storybooks; (4) interactive flannel boards; and (5) attractively designed worksheets. The use of these visually rich, colorful materials is based on a study (Sari, 2021) which found that colorful visual materials can significantly improve memory and learning interest in early childhood.

Activity evaluation is conducted in three stages: (1) pre-activity assessment using observation sheets and oral tests; (2) process monitoring through daily anecdotal notes and participatory observation; and (3) post-activity assessment using the same instruments as the pre-activity assessment. Success was defined as at least 70% of students demonstrating improved skills in each measured literacy aspect. Additionally, a brief two-day training session was conducted for teachers on literacy learning strategies and the development of media using local materials to ensure the program's sustainable implementation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The community service activity at Bunda Kindergarten in Kanali Village, South Totikum District, was carried out for 30 effective days, with a total of 21 students actively participating. The activity proceeded according to plan, with an average student attendance rate of 95.2%. The students' high enthusiasm was evident from the first day, especially when they were introduced to colorful letter cards and song-based games. This is consistent with a study (Nugraha, 2021),

which found that a gamification and song approach to early childhood literacy significantly increased motivation and participation.

Based on the results of the initial assessment conducted before the activity, the average student ability was still very low. Of the 21 children, only 5 (23.8%) were able to recognize more than half of the letters of the alphabet, only 4 (19%) were able to read simple syllables, and only 7 (33.3%) were able to write their own names. This situation illustrates the urgency of structured and systematic literacy interventions, as recommended by Nurul Istiqomah (2022) in their study of children's literacy needs in the 3T (third-most vulnerable) areas.

After 30 days of program implementation, post-activity assessment results showed significant improvement. Details of changes in student literacy skills are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Improvement in Literacy Skills of Bunda Kindergarten Students (n=21)

Literacy Aspects	Pre-Activity (Number/Percentage)	Post-Activity (Number/Percentage)
Recognizing the alphabet (≥ 20 letters)	5 Children (23,8%)	21 Children (100%)
Membaca suku kata sederhana	4 Children (19,0%)	18 Children (85,7%)
Menulis nama sendiri	7 Children (33,3%)	21 Children (100%)
Membaca kata benda sederhana	3 Children (14,3%)	16 Children (76,2%)

Table 1 shows that all literacy aspects measured showed improvements that exceeded the established success criteria (at least 70%). The most significant improvements occurred in the areas of alphabet recognition, which reached 100%, and writing one's own name, which also reached 100%. This success is closely tied to the use of colored letter cards and song-based games, which create a fun and repetitive learning experience for the children. These findings align with research results indicating that the use of colored letter cards can improve preschoolers' letter recognition skills by 80.3% over a four-week period (Permata, 2022).

As for the improvements in syllable reading (85.7%) and noun reading (76.2%), although they have not yet reached 100%, they still demonstrate excellent results and exceed the target indicators. The three children who have not yet achieved the ability to read simple words were identified as having language development delays requiring further intervention. This situation underscores the importance of individual assessment from the outset, as previously noted by researchers that not all young children develop at the same pace, making an individualized approach essential (Mursid, 2020).

Table 2. Evaluation of the Implementation of the Community Service Program

Evaluation Aspects	Strengths	Weakness/ Threat
Learning Method	Play-based learning is easily accepted by children, increasing enthusiasm and active participation.	Requires a large play space; limited classroom space impacts children's mobility.
Learning Media	Letter cards and flashcards effectively improve children's visual memory.	Media production costs are limited; media is easily damaged due to humid classroom conditions.
Teacher Involvement	Teachers successfully understood and adapted play-based literacy learning strategies.	The workload of teachers and principals reduced time for personal development.
Student Participation	Attendance reached 95.2%; all children actively participated in each session.	3 children required extra support due to delayed language development.

The level of difficulty in implementing the activities can be categorized as moderate. The biggest challenge faced is the limited space of the classroom (6x8 meters), which is too small to accommodate 21 children at once during play activities that require more room to move around. Additionally, the highly varied initial abilities of the students require a differentiated approach that demands extra energy and creativity from the implementation team. This aligns with research indicating that the heterogeneity of young children's abilities within a single classroom is a common challenge requiring well-developed instructional differentiation strategies (Yus, 2021).

Opportunities for future development are wide open. This program can be developed into a literacy intervention model for schools in island regions with similar characteristics. Furthermore, the development of literacy modules based on local content from the Banggai Islands can serve as relevant and contextually appropriate teaching materials for children in this region. Parental involvement in family literacy programs also has the potential to be enhanced, given that parents play a crucial role in the sustainability of children's literacy development outside of school (Anggraini, 2022).



Figure 1. Implementation of Basic Literacy Strengthening Activities for Early Childhood

The image above documents an activity to strengthen basic literacy skills in early childhood, focusing on reading simple nouns and writing capital letters and their own names – all designed to be contextually relevant and meaningful for the students. The reading activity focuses on introducing nouns related to children’s daily lives, such as “house,” “tree,” “market,” and “garden,” using illustrations from the surrounding environment – such as images of the village hall, gardens, rivers, and farm animals they commonly see. Teachers connect learning to direct experiences, for example, through activities such as observing the school environment or sharing stories about activities at home. Next, children are trained to write capital letters through activities involving tracing and copying the first letter of their names as well as the names of local places. Writing their own names is done gradually, starting with recognizing the initial letter written in uppercase and progressing to writing their full names independently. All materials are designed based on local contexts so that children feel connected to the content, increasing their interest in learning and building a strong foundation in literacy from an early age.

CONCLUSION

A community service activity aimed at strengthening basic literacy skills among early childhood students at Bunda Kindergarten in Kanali Village, South Totikum District – involving 21 students – has been successfully implemented with satisfactory results. This program proved effective in improving children’s basic literacy skills, including letter recognition (23.8% to 100%), reading syllables (19% to 85.7%), writing their own names (33.3% to 100%), and reading simple words (14.3% to 76.2%). All of these achievements exceeded the established success indicator of 70%.

The strengths of this program lie in its play-based learning approach, which aligns with the characteristics and developmental needs of young children; the use of contextual and engaging visual materials; and the active involvement of teachers in the implementation process. The identified weaknesses include limited

classroom space, a highly heterogeneous baseline ability among students, and the presence of three children requiring further intervention due to language development delays.

For future development, it is recommended that this program serve as a model for replication in schools across island regions with similar conditions, supplemented by the development of literacy modules based on local content, and expanded to include family literacy programs that involve parents. Support from local governments is also needed to provide adequate resources and ongoing training for educators to ensure the sustainability and improved quality of literacy programs in remote areas.

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