

The Implementation of Participatory Action Research (PAR) to Enhance Basic Iqro' Reading Skills among Children in Alue Buloh Village

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Artikel submit	111625
Artikel review	121025
Artikel accepted	120425

Abstract

This community service initiative was conducted in Balee Carong, Alue Buloh Village, a rural area facing significant educational access challenges due to damaged bridge infrastructure. The lack of reliable transportation severely limited children's access to supplementary education, including tutoring and religious studies. The program aimed to improve children's basic skills in Iqro' reading, memorization of short surahs and daily prayers, as well as fundamental literacy and numeracy through engaging and participatory learning methods. Employing Participatory Action Research (PAR) as the framework, university students acted as facilitators and collaborators, working directly with the community to implement educational interventions. Over a 45-day period, activities such as game-based learning, singing, storytelling, and creative exercises were conducted to foster both religious and academic growth. The results indicated significant improvement in Iqro' reading skills, memorization of prayers and surahs, and basic literacy and numeracy. Quantitative and qualitative assessments showed that most children advanced in Iqro' proficiency, and a majority demonstrated increased fluency in memorizing Islamic prayers and short Quranic chapters. Additionally, there were notable improvements in reading, writing, and arithmetic skills. The program concluded with a "Festival Anak Sholeh" (Righteous Children's Festival) where children showcased their newly acquired skills, and an educational field trip that provided cultural enrichment. These outcomes highlight the effectiveness of the PAR approach in enhancing educational quality through community involvement, engaging teaching strategies, and emotional connections. The study offers insights for educators and policymakers addressing educational disparities in remote areas.

Keywords: Play-based Learning; Non-Formal Education; Islamic Literacy; Underserved Areas

Abstrak

Program pengabdian masyarakat ini dilaksanakan di Balee Carong, Desa Alue Buloh, sebuah komunitas pedesaan terpencil yang mengalami keterbatasan akses pendidikan signifikan akibat kerusakan infrastruktur jembatan. Kendala geografis ini telah membatasi kesempatan anak-anak untuk mendapatkan pendidikan tambahan, termasuk program bimbingan belajar dan pengajian. Program ini bertujuan untuk meningkatkan kemampuan dasar anak dalam membaca Iqro', menghafal surah pendek dan doa sehari-hari, serta kompetensi literasi dan numerasi dasar melalui metodologi pembelajaran partisipatif dan menarik. Menggunakan Participatory Action Research

(PAR) sebagai kerangka dasar, proyek ini memposisikan mahasiswa sebagai fasilitator dan agen perubahan kolaboratif yang bekerja langsung dengan masyarakat. Selama periode implementasi 45 hari, kegiatan pendidikan disampaikan melalui pendekatan interaktif termasuk pembelajaran berbasis permainan, nyanyian, bercerita, dan berbagai latihan kreatif yang disesuaikan dengan konteks lokal. Hasil implementasi menunjukkan kemajuan yang signifikan dalam dimensi religius dan akademik pada anak-anak peserta. Assessment kuantitatif dan kualitatif mengungkapkan bahwa mayoritas anak menunjukkan peningkatan substansial dalam kemahiran membaca Iqro', dengan peningkatan jumlah hafalan doa dan surah pendek Al-Qur'an. Secara bersamaan, peserta juga menunjukkan kemajuan nyata dalam kemampuan membaca, menulis, dan berhitung dasar. Program diakhiri dengan dua acara penutup yang signifikan: "Festival Anak Sholeh" yang berfungsi sebagai platform evaluasi komprehensif dimana anak-anak mendemonstrasikan pengetahuan yang telah diperoleh, serta kegiatan riuh edukatif yang dirancang sebagai aktivitas rekreasi dan pengayaan budaya. Temuan ini membuktikan bahwa metodologi PAR, ketika diimplementasikan melalui strategi keterlibatan emosional, partisipasi aktif masyarakat, dan teknik pedagogis yang menyenangkan, secara efektif dapat meningkatkan kualitas pendidikan bagi anak-anak di daerah terpencil yang kurang terlayani. Studi ini menawarkan wawasan berharga bagi praktisi pendidikan dan pembuat kebijakan yang berupaya mengatasi kesenjangan pendidikan di komunitas terpencil melalui intervensi yang sesuai konteks.

Kata kunci: Pembelajaran Berbasis Permainan; Pendidikan Non-Formal; Literasi Keagamaan; Wilayah Terpencil

INTRODUCTION

Education serves as the primary foundation for sustainable community development. Access to adequate and continuous education is key to improving the quality of human resources, particularly in rural areas. However, field realities indicate that many regions still face challenges in optimally fulfilling educational needs, whether in terms of infrastructure, geography, social factors, or other constraints.

One concrete example can be observed in Alue Buloh Village, a developing village situated in a strategic location yet experiencing limitations in physical inter-regional access (Shanda, n.d.). Geographical barriers, such as the collapse of bridges connecting villages, directly impact educational delays. Children who need to travel outside the village for schooling must undertake risky journeys using rafts. Unpredictable natural conditions further exacerbate the risks and obstacles in accessing educational services, consequently creating disruptions in the teaching-learning process.

On the other hand, the majority of the population in Alue Buloh works for the coal mining company PT BEL. This village is categorized as a "ring 1" area, meaning it is the closest residential area to the company's operational zone and typically receives priority in various programs, including employment opportunities (*PT Bara Energi Lestari, Sang Pioneer - PT MIFA Bersaudara*, n.d.). This "ring 1" status has fostered a prevailing assumption that simply being a local resident is sufficient to secure employment at PT BEL without undergoing a rigorous selection process.

This mindset has indirectly diminished the perceived importance of education. Many young people do not pursue higher education, believing that job opportunities at PT BEL are promising enough. This situation creates a critical challenge where immediate economic prospects risk undermining long-term investment in human capital through education, potentially affecting the community's sustainable development.

However, this situation harbors long-term risks. The community's dependence on a single source of employment makes them economically vulnerable. The company will not operate in the area indefinitely; if its activities decline or cease, the community, lacking adequate skills and education will struggle to find alternative employment.

The low education level of the local population also poses a challenge for PT BEL itself. Although the company is committed to prioritizing local hiring, the reality is that many strategic positions cannot be filled by local residents due to qualification gaps. The company requires a workforce with technical, administrative, and managerial expertise, which is generally only possessed by individuals with higher education or specialized training. Consequently, PT BEL is forced to recruit workers from outside the region to meet its operational needs.

In response to these challenges, UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh, STAIN Teungku Dirundeng Meulaboh, and PT BEL recognize the critical importance of fostering awareness within the community, particularly among the younger generation, that education is a long-term investment. Education not only opens up opportunities but also serves as a safeguard in times of economic change. A spirit of learning, pursuing higher education, and developing skills outside the industrial sector must be continuously nurtured so that the people of Alue Buloh can progress independently and sustainably.

It is within this context that the Stage V Thematic Community Service Program (Kuliah Pengabdian Masyarakat - KPM) was initiated. This program serves as an implementation of the Three Pillars of Higher Education, specifically the aspect of community service. Through this initiative, students were deployed to strengthen children's enthusiasm for learning, provide motivation, and create a enjoyable learning atmosphere via the Balee Carong facility in Alue Buloh Village. The presence of the Stage V Thematic KPM students is expected to serve as an initial bridge for instilling an awareness of the importance of education, while also providing self-capacity and a passion for learning, without being entirely dependent on the surrounding environmental conditions.

COMMUNITY PROFILE AND PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION

General description

This community service program focused on enhancing basic skills among children in Alue Buloh Village using a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach. Involving 40 elementary school children, the program aimed to address issues of low Qur'an literacy, memorization of short surahs and daily prayers, as well as basic reading, writing, and arithmetic skills.

The program was implemented through interactive and enjoyable learning activities at Balee Carong over 45 days, utilizing methods such as games, singing, storytelling, and other creative activities. The results showed significant improvements in both religious and academic aspects, concluding with a Righteous Children's Festival and an educational field trip as appreciation. This program successfully demonstrated that the PAR approach is effective in creating an engaging and meaningful learning space for children in remote areas.

Table 1. Target description

No	Name of target	Characteristics of target	Amount	General problem or targets
1	Children of Alue Buloh Village	Elementary school children (grades 1-6) participating in activities at Balee Carong	40 Children	1. Low ability in reading Iqro' and Al-Qur'an 2. Inaccurate mastery of hijaiyah letters and tajwid

3. Limited memorization of short surahs and daily prayers
4. Basic literacy and numeracy skills that need improvement

Problem

Table 2 Problem and solution

No	Problem	Solution	Success Indicators
1	Education: 1. Low Qur'an literacy skills 2. Inaccurate mastery of hijaiyah letters and tajwid 3. Limited basic literacy and numeracy skills	1. Systematic Iqro' and Qur'an learning 2. Interactive and enjoyable learning methods 3. Intensive mentoring by facilitators 4. Use of creative learning media	1. Improvement in Iqro' reading levels 2. Increase in memorization of surahs and prayers 3. Ability to read simple sentences 4. Mastery of basic mathematical operations
2	Social: 1. Lack of learning motivation among children 2. Low perception about the importance of education 3. Dependence on mining company jobs	1. Motivation and awareness programs 2. Righteous Children's Festival as appreciation 3. Learning through games and songs 4. Educational field trips	1. Increased learning enthusiasm 2. Regular attendance in activities 3. Active participation in learning sessions 4. Behavioral changes regarding the importance of education

METHOD

This community service initiative utilized the Participatory Action Research (PAR) method, which emphasizes active collaboration between researchers and the community to address local issues (Cornish et al., 2023; Snapp et al., 2023). The program engaged 40 children from Balee Carong, Alue Buloh Village, East Seunagan District, Nagan Raya Regency. The initiative followed a series of well-structured stages to ensure effective learning outcomes.

Initially, the children's needs were assessed, and based on this evaluation, participants were grouped into small teams of 4-5 children. Each group was assigned a mentor responsible for guiding the learning process and ensuring that sessions were focused and productive. The primary learning objectives were centered on improving Qur'an and Iqro' recitation, memorization of short surahs, daily prayers, and enhancing basic literacy and numeracy skills.

The learning sessions were conducted using interactive and participatory methods, such as storytelling, games, and hands-on activities, to ensure children remained engaged and comprehended the material effectively. Attendance was recorded at the start of each session to monitor participation and track the children's progress. Regular evaluations were carried out through both quantitative assessments and direct observations by mentors, helping to identify areas for improvement and challenges in the learning process.

Follow-up actions were implemented as the program progressed, including motivational support and adjustments to teaching methods to better align with the children's learning needs. The data collected, through field observations, revealed several challenges. Many children struggled with unfamiliarity with hijaiyah letters and basic Qur'anic recitation, while some were unable to apply tajweed rules properly. Despite some children being in grades 4–6, their literacy and numeracy skills were still underdeveloped.

In response, the program employed creative teaching strategies to foster interest and improve learning. At the conclusion, a comprehensive evaluation was held to assess the achievement of the program's goals and measure its impact on the children's skills and motivation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

For 45 days, the alternative education program at Balee Carong in Alue Buloh Village successfully created a much-anticipated learning space for children, filling the gap in educational access that was previously limited. Their enthusiasm was clearly visible, marking the beginning of a journey of significant development in both religious aspects and basic literacy.

The most encouraging progress was seen in the children's Iqro' reading ability. Like growing sprouts, nearly all children showed rapid advancement with an average increase of 5 to 10 pages. Pride shone through when several children were even able to transition from Iqro' to reading the Quran, demonstrating increasingly precise mastery of hijaiyah letters and pronunciation. Not only that, the spirit of memorization also flourished. More than half of the children added 3-5 short surahs to their memorization repertoire, while 13 children successfully mastered 2-5 new daily prayers. These achievements are not merely numbers, but tangible evidence of the strengthening of religious values that are beginning to integrate into their daily lives.

Table 3: Development of Religious Aspects

Aspect Measured	Achievement Level	Progress Details
Iqro Reading	18 children showed improvement	Average progress of 5-10 pages. 3 children advanced to Quran reading level.
Short Surah Memorization	12 children expanded their memorization	Average addition of 3-5 new surahs.
Daily Prayer Memorization	13 children enhanced their memorization	Average addition of 2-5 new prayers.

Description: Table 3 demonstrates significant achievements in religious aspects among the 40 children participating in the program. The majority of children (18 children) showed progress in Iqro reading, with 3 children successfully advancing to Quran reading level. Twelve children expanded their memorization of short surahs, and 13 children mastered new daily prayers.

In the area of basic literacy, a transformation also took place. Many children who initially could not recognize letters were now able to form words and write their own names with confidence. Basic arithmetic skills, such as addition and subtraction, also saw a significant leap, with approximately 75% of children demonstrating markedly improved understanding. This progress proves that the teaching methods implemented effectively addressed their fundamental needs (Uno & Mohamad, 2022). The key to this success lay in the enjoyable learning atmosphere. Varied instructional methods such as learning through play, singing, storytelling, coloring, and even role-playing—successfully created a relaxed and engaging environment (Rahayu, 2022). Instead of feeling burdened, the children felt as though they were being taken on an adventure into the world of knowledge (Faza et al., 2024). This approach aligns with modern educational theory, as emphasized by (Aminah & Mauliyah, 2025; Faza et al., 2024), which states that play-based learning effectively stimulates children's cognitive, social, and emotional abilities in a balanced manner. At Balee Carong, this theory became a reality: laughter and joy became faithful companions to every achievement made.

As the culmination of this journey, the "Festival Anak Sholeh" (Righteous Children's Festival) was held. This event served as a proud stage for the children to showcase their abilities, ranging from reciting short surahs and daily prayers to performing the call to prayer (azan) and delivering speeches. The festival proved to be an effective platform for strengthening character, building self-confidence, and providing the highest appreciation for their efforts (Mayori & Riyati, 2024; Ramli et al., 2025). The program concluded with an educational field trip (*rihlah*), which successfully refreshed their minds while strengthening the emotional bonds between the children and the facilitators (Delviana et al., 2021; Mayori & Riyati, 2024).

Overall, the program at Balee Carong stands as tangible evidence that education can flourish anywhere, even in isolated regions. Through creativity, a humanistic approach, and a commitment to fostering joy in learning, the children not only gained knowledge but also grew in self-confidence, enthusiasm, and happiness—qualities that will serve as valuable assets for their future.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The 45-day community service program implemented at Balee Carong, Alue Buloh Village, has made a tangible contribution to enhancing the educational capacity of children in this isolated region. Amid limited access and a scarcity of non-formal educational facilities, this program successfully established an enjoyable, safe, and meaningful learning space for the children. The progress achieved encompassed not only improved skills in reading *Iqro'* and the Quran, memorizing short surahs, and daily prayers but also fundamental literacy and numeracy abilities such as reading, writing, and arithmetic. This success was significantly influenced by the varied and engaging teaching methods employed. A flexible approach incorporating games, songs, storytelling, and artistic activities proved effective in encouraging enthusiastic participation. The children developed not only cognitively but also experienced growth in social and emotional aspects, such as self-confidence, courage to perform in public, and collaborative skills in group settings.

The learning evaluation through the "Festival Anak Sholeh" (Righteous Children's Festival) and the concluding educational field trip further reinforced the program's positive impact. This demonstrates that education becomes more meaningful when it emphasizes not only academic outcomes but also holistically considers the accompanying experiences, interactions, and emotional development.

Based on these conclusions, the following suggestions are proposed:

1. Similar PAR-based educational programs should be replicated in other isolated communities facing comparable educational challenges.
2. Local governments and private sectors are encouraged to provide sustained support for such non-formal education initiatives to ensure long-term impact and sustainability.
3. Future programs should maintain the integration of play-based learning methodologies while incorporating regular monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

This version maintains all your original content while creating a clearer separation between conclusions and suggestions, making it more academically conventional and reader-friendly. The suggestions are now specifically numbered and slightly expanded to show different aspects of implementation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

First and foremost, the author would like to express gratitude to Allah SWT for His blessings and grace, which enabled the completion of this Community Service report. The author would also like to extend deepest appreciation and thanks to:

1. PT Bara Energi Lestari for their financial support and facilities provided during the implementation of the Stage V Thematic Community Service Program in Alue Buloh Village.
2. The Alue Buloh Village Government and all community members who welcomed and supported the smooth execution of this program.
3. The Field Supervising Lecturers for their guidance and direction throughout the program.
4. The parents/guardians and participating children at Balee Carong for their active participation and enthusiasm for learning.
5. All parties who cannot be mentioned individually but contributed to the success of this program.

The author acknowledges that this report is still far from perfect. Therefore, constructive feedback and suggestions are highly appreciated for future improvements. May the results of this community service be beneficial to all parties involved.

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