



Enhancing Children's Literacy and Basic Skills Through an Educational Approach in Gampong Empee Tanong

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Abstract

Education is the primary foundation for developing excellent human resources; however, significant challenges persist, particularly in rural areas. Preliminary observations in Gampong Empee Tanong, Aceh Besar, revealed that children there face low literacy and numeracy skills, a lack of learning motivation, and unhealthy lifestyle habits. The purpose of this community service program was to address these issues through a structured educational mentoring program. The activities were conducted over four days, from August 25 to 28, 2025, involving a team of lecturers and students who employed a participatory approach. The program included interactive sessions on reading, arithmetic, drawing, and hygiene education. The results showed a significant positive impact. Children's literacy and numeracy skills improved substantially, with average increases of 39.7% in literacy and 27.3% in numeracy. In addition, students' learning motivation rose by an average of 63.3%, demonstrating the effectiveness of active learning methods. Creativity and self-expression also increased by an average of 58.7%. The most notable change was observed in healthy living behaviours, where all participants who initially had low handwashing skills showed significant improvement, reaching the "good" or "very good" categories after educational sessions and demonstrations. Overall, this program successfully demonstrated that integrated non-formal educational interventions can serve as an effective solution to empower children and address educational challenges in rural communities.

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1. Introduction

Education, in its essence, is more than the transfer of knowledge; it is the fundamental foundation that shapes character and determines the future direction of a nation. Through education, a country invests in its generations to create excellent, innovative, and globally competitive human resources. This concept aligns with UNESCO's view that education is the most critical driver for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and is a driving force for peace, prosperity, and sustainable development [1]–[3]. An educated generation is the key to progress and prosperity, as it has the capacity to solve complex problems, drive economic growth, and advance civilisation. Furthermore, education

reflects the dignity of a nation in the eyes of the world, showing how far a country invests in the intellectual and moral potential of its citizens [4]–[7].

In the Indonesian context, the dynamics of education are developing rapidly, primarily driven by technological advancement. These changes are reflected in ongoing curriculum reforms designed to meet the demands of globalisation and digitalisation. However, behind this progress, the Indonesian education sector still faces significant challenges [8]–[10]. Various studies show that while access has improved, the quality of education remains a crucial issue [11]–[13]. Disparities between urban and rural education, as well as gaps in teacher quality and educational facilities, remain urgent problems that need to be addressed. According to a World Bank report (2018), inequalities in teacher quality and school facilities remain highly evident, directly affecting student learning outcomes [14]–[16]. Furthermore, the adaptation to new curricula is often hampered by inadequate teacher training and limited supporting infrastructure, especially in remote areas. Research by the OECD (2020) also highlights that, although Indonesia has made substantial investments in education, unresolved issues remain regarding the effectiveness of expenditures and the relevance of curricula to labour market needs [17]–[19].

From these perspectives, it can be concluded that education is an indispensable foundation for national progress, and Indonesia is on the right track in aligning its education system with modern developments. However, the journey is not without obstacles. Quality disparities, curriculum implementation, and the relevance of education to the job market are challenges that must be overcome. Therefore, collaboration among the government, educators, parents, and communities is essential to ensure that every child in Indonesia has equal access to quality education. Only then can the vision of building a golden generation and a better future be realised. One clear example of these challenges is found in rural areas, such as Gampong Empee Tanong in Montasik Subdistrict, Aceh Besar Regency. Geographically and topographically, Gampong Empee Tanong lies in a fertile lowland area, surrounded by rice fields and plantations. Access to the village is relatively adequate, yet the lack of supporting facilities for non-formal education remains a constraint. Most community members work as farmers and agricultural labourers, maintaining strong social ties and a culture of cooperation. While this creates a warm and supportive environment, parents' busy work schedules often limit supervision of their children's education.

Despite the abundant natural potential and a supportive social environment, preliminary observations suggest that children in this area face several challenges, including low literacy, weak numeracy skills, a lack of learning motivation, and unhealthy living habits. These findings align with research noting that educational problems in rural areas often include low literacy among children and poor hygiene practices [20]–[22]. Such conditions can hinder children's cognitive and social development, ultimately affecting the quality of future human resources [23]–[25]. Therefore, a structured community service initiative is needed to foster and empower children in the village. This program is designed to provide basic guidance in reading, arithmetic, drawing, and hygiene education, promoting positive behavioural changes and enhancing their quality of life.

2. Methodology

This community service activity was conducted over four days, from August 25 to 28, 2025, at the Meunasah of Gampong Empee Tanong. The target participants were children aged 7 to 15 years. The program involved a team of lecturers and students, applying participatory and educational approaches. The implementation was divided into four main sessions:

- a) Reading and Numeracy Session
This session employed phonics methods and quick-counting exercises using word cards and number games. Children were divided into small groups based on their ability levels to ensure more personalised guidance [26].
- b) Drawing and Colouring Session

This activity aimed to develop creativity and fine motor skills. Beyond focusing on drawing techniques, the session also served as a medium for self-expression and communication. The drawing themes were often related to the environment or the children's aspirations [27].

c) Clean Living Education Session

This was delivered through storytelling, songs, and practical demonstrations. The main topic taught was proper handwashing techniques [28].

d) Practical Session

Following the educational segment, children were encouraged to directly practice the lessons, such as washing hands together or cleaning the learning area [29].

3. Result & Discussion

The implementation of this community service program received a positive response from both the community and the children of Gampong Empee Tanong. A total of 15 participants took part in the activities, consisting of 5 boys and 10 girls. The participants were between 7 and 15 years old, with educational levels ranging from Elementary School (SD) to Junior High School (SMP). The complete data are presented in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Number of Participants in the Community Service Program

No.	Gender	Age Range	School Level	Number
1.	Male	7 - 10	SD	5
2.	Memale	8 – 15	SD - SMP	10
Total				15

Based on the evaluations conducted at the beginning and the end of the program, several significant improvement indicators were identified, as follows:

a) Improvement in Literacy and Numeracy Skills

The evaluation results regarding the literacy and numeracy abilities of the children in Gampong Empee Tanong are presented as follows.

Table 2. Improvement in Literacy and Numeracy

Student No.	Initial Literacy	Final Literacy	Literacy Improvement (%)	Initial Numeracy	Final Numeracy	Numeracy Improvement
1	45	72	60.0	40	64	60.0
2	40	56	40.0	42	59	40.5
3	35	56	60.0	38	58.9	55.0
4	42	52.5	25.0	40	56	40.0
5	38	57	50.0	45	72	60.0
6	50	67.5	35.0	42	54.6	30.0
7	40	56	40.0	38	55.1	45.0
8	35	42	20.0	40	50	25.0
9	42	65.1	55.0	38	57	50.0
10	38	60.8	60.0	40	64	60.0
11	40	46	15.0	38	45.6	20.0
12	40	52	30.0	42	56.7	35.0
13	42	63	50.0	38	55.1	45.0
14	50	70	40.0	40	54	35.0
15	40	50	25.0	42	54.6	30.0
Rata-rata	41,1	56,4	39,7	40,2	59,5	27,3

Based on the data presented in **Table 2**, it is evident that, before the implementation of the program, students' literacy and numeracy abilities were at a relatively low level. Initial literacy scores ranged from 35 to 50, while numeracy scores ranged from 38 to 45. This indicates that most students had not yet mastered basic skills in reading, text comprehension, as well as performing arithmetic and solving numerical problems effectively. Following the intervention, which included contextual learning approaches, practice exercises, educational games, and intensive mentoring, significant improvements were observed in both aspects. Final literacy scores ranged from 60 to 76, while numeracy scores ranged from 54 to 72. On average, literacy improved by approximately 39.7%, and numeracy by 27.3%, resulting in a combined overall average increase of 67%, categorised as good.

These improvements demonstrate that active, adaptive, and needs-based learning methods can foster tangible progress in students' basic competencies. Students became more confident in reading, understanding information, and solving numerical problems with more effective strategies. This outcome underscores the importance of community-based interventions in promoting the attainment of literacy and numeracy competencies at the basic education level. One of the most notable results of the program was that children who previously struggled with reading were now able to recognise letters, syllables, and even spell simple words. Their basic arithmetic skills also improved, as evidenced by their ability to complete simple addition and subtraction problems accurately and successfully. The improvement in literacy and numeracy achieved through this program is illustrated in the following figure.

This success cannot be separated from the application of interactive learning methods such as phonics and number games [30]. These approaches made learning an enjoyable activity, reduced pressure, and indirectly enhanced children's absorption of knowledge. Furthermore, the use of engaging teaching media also contributed to improved literacy and numeracy outcomes [31].



Figure 1. Children Engaged in Reading Using the Phonics Method and Practising Numeracy Skills

b) **Improvement in Learning Motivation**

Based on the evaluation results regarding learning motivation through active learning, the children in Gampong Empee Tanong demonstrated the following outcomes.

Table 3. Improvement in Learning Motivation

Student No.	Initial Motivation	Final Motivation	Improvement (%)
1	40	68	70.0
2	35	59.5	70.0
3	30	51	70.0
4	38	64.6	70.0
5	45	76.5	70.0
6	40	66	65.0
7	42	69.3	65.0
8	36	59.4	65.0

Student No.	Initial Motivation	Final Motivation	Improvement (%)
9	30	49.5	65.0
10	35	57.8	65.0
11	40	64	60.0
12	38	60.8	60.0
13	45	72	60.0
14	42	67.2	60.0
15	36	57.6	60.0
Rata-rata	38,1	64,2	63,3

Based on the data in Table 3, before the program's implementation, most students demonstrated relatively low levels of learning motivation. Initial motivation scores ranged from 30 to 45, reflecting a lack of enthusiasm, focus, and internal drive in the learning process. The limited variety of teaching methods, minimal emotional engagement, or an insufficient understanding of learning objectives may have contributed to this condition after the interactive and reflective activities were carried out, which incorporated experiential approaches, reinforced learning values, and provided opportunities for students to set personal goals. A significant improvement was observed. The average increase in learning motivation reached 63.3% (high), with some students showing gains of up to 70%. Students became more enthusiastic in following lessons, demonstrated initiative in asking questions and completing tasks, and began setting personal learning targets independently.

This improvement shows that the proper intervention can stimulate students' intrinsic motivation. When students feel valued, supported, and actively engaged in the learning process, they tend to display positive and sustainable changes in attitude. These results provide evidence that community service programs focusing on students' psychological and emotional aspects have a tangible impact on learning quality. The interactive and participatory design of the program successfully ignited the enthusiasm of children who had previously shown low motivation. They no longer felt afraid or pressured when engaging with learning materials. The increase in motivation was reflected in their active participation in discussions, courage to ask questions, and willingness to help peers. A supportive and informal learning environment created by the volunteer team was a key factor in fostering children's self-confidence. The use of games as interactive educational media, such as the Snakes and Ladders game, also had a positive effect on enhancing learning motivation [32], [33].

c) Improvement in Creativity and Expression

Based on the evaluation results regarding the creativity and expression of the children in Gampong Empee Tanong during the drawing and colouring activities, the following data were obtained.

Table 4. Improvement in Creativity and Expression

Student No.	Initial Creativity	Final Creativity	Creativity Improvement (%)	Initial Expression	Final Expression	Expression Improvement
1	40	68	70.0	38	64.6	70.0
2	35	59.5	70.0	32	54.4	70.0
3	30	51	70.0	28	47.6	70.0
4	38	64.6	70.0	35	59.5	70.0
5	45	76.5	70.0	42	71.4	70.0
6	40	64	60.0	38	60.8	60.0
7	42	67.2	60.0	40	64	60.0
8	36	57.6	60.0	34	54.4	60.0
9	30	49.5	65.0	28	46.2	65.0
10	35	57.8	65.0	32	52.8	65.0
11	40	60	50.0	38	57	50.0
12	38	57	50.0	36	54	50.0

13	45	67.5	50.0	42	63	50.0
14	42	63	50.0	40	60	50.0
15	36	54	50.0	34	51	50.0
Rata-rata	38,1	59,6	58,7	35,8	58,2	58,7

Based on the data in Table 4, the program was attended by 15 students who initially displayed varying levels of creativity and expression, with initial scores ranging from 30 to 45. After participating in the drawing and colouring sessions designed to stimulate imagination, encourage self-expression, and explore colours and shapes, significant improvements were observed in both aspects. The average increase in students' creativity reached approximately 58.7%, with some students showing gains of up to 70%. This was evident in their ability to produce more complex works, their bold use of colours, and their capacity to communicate ideas through drawings. Meanwhile, the aspect of expression also improved at a comparable rate, averaging 58.7% (moderate). Students became more open in conveying emotions and ideas visually, while also demonstrating greater confidence when presenting their artwork.

Overall, the program successfully enhanced students' capacity for creative thinking and visual self-expression. The consistent improvements across both aspects suggest that an arts-based approach can serve as an effective strategy for character development and 21st-century skills, particularly in the context of primary education. The drawing and colouring sessions provided space for children to explore their imagination and express their feelings. The works produced not only reflected improvements in fine motor skills but also served as a mirror of their understanding of the environment and their aspirations. Some children were even able to illustrate moral messages from stories shared during the sessions, indicating a link between creativity and cognitive comprehension. The use of inspiring approaches in drawing enabled students to express emotions, ideas, and creativity through diverse themes and styles, thereby enhancing both creativity and expression [34], [35].



Figure 2: Children Engaged in Drawing and Colouring Activities

d) Changes in Healthy Living Behaviour

Based on the evaluation results regarding the healthy living behaviours of the children in Gampong Empee Tanong, specifically their handwashing skills, the following data were obtained.

Table 5. Handwashing Ability Before and After the Program

No	Before the Program	After the Program
1	Low	Good
2	Low	Very Good
3	Low	Fairly Good
4	Low	Good
5	Low	Very Good

6	Low	Good
7	Low	Fairly Good
8	Low	Good
9	Low	Very Good
10	Low	Good
11	Low	Fairly Good
12	Low	Good
13	Low	Very Good
14	Low	Fairly Good
15	Low	Good

Based on the data in Table 5, it was found that before the program was implemented, the majority of students did not yet possess adequate handwashing skills. Of the 15 students involved, all demonstrated low ability in handwashing, both in terms of technique and awareness of the importance of hand hygiene. After the educational activities, which included demonstrations, hands-on practice, and reinforcement of understanding about hand hygiene, there was a significant and varied improvement in skills. A total of 5 students (33%) demonstrated outstanding handwashing ability, seven students (47%) were in the good category, and three students (20%) were categorised as having good handwashing ability. The children were able to understand and apply correct handwashing techniques, use soap properly, and recognise key times for handwashing, such as before meals, after playing, and after using the toilet.

This improvement shows that interactive and practical educational approaches can effectively change basic hygiene behaviour in a short period of time. The results also reflect the success of the community service program in establishing healthy habits that directly contribute to disease prevention and improved quality of life for the students. Clean and healthy living education delivered in a practical and hands-on manner proved to be effective. The children are now more accustomed to practising proper handwashing techniques and have become more mindful of personal hygiene and environmental cleanliness. This behavioural change suggests that demonstration and hands-on practice methods are more readily absorbed and applied by children compared to purely theoretical explanations. This growing awareness of the importance of hygiene is expected to develop into a lasting habit in adulthood. The use of the six-step handwashing demonstration and gradual toothbrushing practice in teaching clean and healthy living behaviours significantly improved students' healthy living skills, highlighting the importance of selecting effective learning strategies [36], [37].



Figure 3: Children Observing the Proper Technique of Handwashing

4. Conclusion

This community service program has had a significantly positive impact on the children of Gampong Empee Tanong, Montasik District, Aceh Besar Regency. The improvement in fundamental learning skills, literacy, motivation, and awareness of clean-living habits demonstrates that integrated non-formal educational interventions can serve as an effective solution to address various educational challenges in rural settings. Moving forward, it is hoped that similar programs can be sustained and serve as an inspiration for other stakeholders to implement comparable initiatives.

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