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EMPOWERING THE ELDERLY THROUGH A BASIC LITERACY PROGRAM AT THE LENTERA LEARNING CENTER, MAJIDI VILLAGE

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ABSTRAK

Background:
Illiteracy among elderly people is still a significant issue within various areas across Indonesia, including Majidi Village. Reading and writing proficiency is a basic right and freedom all people must enjoy irrespective of their age. The reason for the establishment of the Sanggar Lentera initiative is to empower senior citizens with a passion for learning and basic literacy skills yet to be gained.
Objectives
To increase the basic literacy skills among senior participants to be able to identify and memorize the letters A-Z.
Method:
These activities were conducted for four weeks with one meeting per week. The subjects were four senior citizens with age approximately 60 years. The process of learning was done on a participatory method with a whiteboard as the primary tool for teaching.
Results:
In this program, there were visible positive outcomes with gradual improvements observed every session. In the first session, participants were still having confusion with regard to recognizing the letters. However, there were remarkable improvements observed in the second session with participants successfully identifying and distinguishing the letters A-Z. In the third session, participants could successfully read the letters once they were being read aloud to them. In the fourth session, all participants were able to memorize the letter A-Z on their own.
Conclusion:
The "Sanggar Lentera" program was effective for senior participants to increase their basic literacy skills within a short timeframe and thereby proved that 'there is no age barrier for learning.

Keywords:
elderly literacy, community-based education, lifelong learning

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INTRODUCTION

Background

Literacy is one basic human right that is possessed by every person and is essentially a tool for unlocking higher quality life and full participation within society. Illiteracy is still found among the elderly generation, particularly among regions that originally lacked educational access within Indonesia based on statistics from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS).
Majidi Village has some elderly people who do not yet have the capacity to read and write the Latin letters .This is a challenge to them as they are unable to perform tasks such as reading the names on medicines and forms among other reading tasks involving short messages. Despite all this, the willingness to develop does not come with age restrictions.

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Realizing this reality, a team from the Community Service Program (KKN) from Hamzanwadi University took the initiative to establish the Sanggar Lentera Program, which serves as a learning platform for basic literacy for seniors at Majidi Village. The program is designed to give a second chance for seniors who were unable to attend formal schooling in their younger lives to learn the letters and unlock the door to the world of literacy.

Problem Formulation

From the background above, the problem statements for this community service project can be expressed as follows:

1. How is the implementation process for basic literacy education for seniors at Majidi Village?
2. How is the development of the elderly's literacy skills after joining the Sanggar Lentera Program?

Objectives of the Activity

The aims and objectives for this community service project would be:

- Offer basic literacy education for senior citizens within Majidi Village on recognizing the English alphabet letters A-Z.
- Enhance the ability to read and memorize Latin letters among the elderly.
- Uplift senior citizens through inclusive and sustainable non-formal education.

Benefits of the Activity

The potential benefits from this activity include:

- For the Elderly: Attaining basic literacy skills that can be used outside the classroom.
- For the Community: Raising the literacy rate within Majidi Village.
- For Students: Knowledge application through community service and social awareness.
- For the local government: Providing information and a model for learning literacy among seniors that can be replicated in other regions.

IMPLEMENTATION METHOD

a. Time and Place

This community service activity was conducted at Majidi Village for four weeks with one weekly session. Every session lasted for around 90-120 minutes.

b. Target Participants

The participants for this exercise were senior citizens from Majidi Village and were yet to master the ability to read and write the Latin alphabet. This project was undertaken by 4 participants with a mean age estimated at around 60 years.

c. Teaching Methods

The learning methods employed within the Sanggar Lentera Program were participatory and included the following stages:

1. **Introduction to Letters**
   - Teaching the shape and sound of each letter from A to Z
   - Whiteboard as a principal means of visualization
   - Printing letters with big characters so that they can be easily read by seniors
2. **Repetition and Rein**
   - Repeating the information several times for strengthening the memory
   - Enable each of the participants to practice writing and pronouncing the letters

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- By employing drill methods (repetitive exercises) suitable for the rate at which seniors learn

3. **Gradual**
    - Dividing the letters into smaller groups to facilitate comprehension
    - Positive Reinforcement and Motivation towards Each Progress Made
    - Fostering a relaxed and enjoyable environment for learning
4. **Periodic Evaluation**
    - Evaluating the capabilities of the participants in the meeting
    - Presenting constructive criticism to the participants
    - Adapting teaching methods according to the participants' development
5. **Tools and Materials**
    - Markers or chalk
    - participant notebooks
    - white board
    - Writing tools (pencils, pens)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONACTIVITY IMPLEMENTATION

The Sanggar Lentera Program was conducted in four meetings with considerable progress achieved in each of them. The following is a description of the implementation and results of each meeting:

First Meeting: Introduction Phase

The four seniors demonstrated a great deal of eagerness in the first session, but they seemed puzzled upon first learning the Latin alphabet letters. Indeed, the majority of the subjects had never learned the letters A to Z before in their lives.

The issues involved in this meeting are:

- Difficulty in discriminating similar letter shapes (e.g., b and d, or p and q)
- Limitations in the short-term memory capacity, frequently encountered in older people
- Feelings of low self-esteem and a lack of confidence because they believed that they were "too old" to learn

The teaching faculty has demonstrated a caring and understanding approach to teaching and creating a learning environment. Positive cues to the learners emphasize the fact that it is never too late to learn.

Outcome of Meeting 1:

- Members started identifying several vowel letters (A, E, I, O, & U)
- The participants could imitate the figures of the letters that were written on the board
- A feeling of confidence began to be created, encouraging them to keep learning

The second meeting involves the advanced introduction phase.

The second meeting yielded encouraging developments. The participants began to exhibit the capacity to identify the letters they learned the week before. Most noteworthy, however, was the fact that they were able to distinguish the letters from A to Z, but they needed some more time to remember the names of the said letters.

During this meeting, the learning approaches were enhanced by:

- Pronunciation and articulation: Broad similarities
- Practice in distinguishing letters with similar shapes
- Maker of memory-im

Outcome of Meeting 2:

- Persons were able to identify each and every letter from A to Z
- Increased confidence in naming the letters
- The participants demonstrated independence in their efforts to write the letters

- Learning Enthusiasm levels rose

Third Meeting: Reinforcement Phase

The third meeting was a significant milestone in the learning endeavors. Alhamdulillah, students were able to read the letters fluently, though still needing a stimulus in the form of a reading of the letters by the instructor. This also showed that students were able to enhance their recognition memory, yet still needed encouragement in their recall memory.
Strategies used in this meeting were:

- Analyzing sequentially and randomly written letters
- Listening and repetition exercises
- Name letters without looking at the board, with eyes closed
- Showing appreciation for every success

Outcome of Meeting 3:

- Participants were able to fluently read letters A-Z when they were read aloud firstly
- Enhanced memory for the order of letters
- Participants started identifying different letters without visual help
- The development of personal learning habits independent of the meeting schedule

Fourth Meeting: Independence Phase

The fourth meeting marked a level of success for this project. All the group members were able to memorize their own letters from A to Z without any help. This marked a very successful point for this project, which went beyond their initial goal. Learning literacy for seniors can be exceptionally successful with proper strategies.
Activities done in this final meeting involved:

- Final evaluation of participants' abilities
- Group reflection on the journey of learning
- Commitment to continue learning to the next stage (reading syllables)

Outcome of Meeting 4:

- All subjects (100%) were able to memorize the letters A-Z
- Participants were able to identify the letters in order and randomly with fluency
- Higher levels of participants' confidence
- Increased motivation for further education to a higher standard

DISCUSSION

Successful Outcomes of the Sanggar Lentera Program
The success of the Sanggar Lentera Program in enhancing basic literacy skills for seniors in only four weeks demonstrates a number of key considerations:

1. **Learning Abilities of Seniors**

   Findings from this project contradict the notion that seniors are not able to learn new things. This is due to brain neuroplasticity in humans, which enables individuals to learn regardless of their ages; though, their rates of acquiring knowledge differ. The four subjects proved that seniors are able to meet their learning objectives with proper teaching approaches and high internal motivations.

2. **Importance of the Right Teaching Approach**

   A patient, gradual, and empathetic approach seemed effective for seniors.
   Factors that ensured the success of this project were:
   - Sufficient Repetition: Repetition of a topic also enhances long-term memory
   - Positive Reinforcement: Recognition of all small successes will increase motivations

- Learning Environment: Participants are able to benefit from a pleasant, stress-free environment
- Instructor patience: Giving members sufficient time to absorb information.

3. Social and Psychological Impact

Besides acquiring reading skills, the course also offered other benefits for the students:

- Increased self-esteem, as they were proud of what they accomplished.
- Social involvement: the project proved to be a natural setting for seniors to identify themselves with and communicate with others.
- Inspiring peers, since their success was a motivational factor for other seniors in the community to acquire knowledge.
- A shift in peoples' mindset: This indicated that education would no longer be reserved for youth but for anyone.

4. Problems and Solutions Some of the challenges faced by this program, as well as their solutions, are as follows:

Challenge	Solution
Limited short-term memory	Intensive repetition and use of a consistent learning pattern
Difficulty distinguishing similar letters	Focus on visual differences and comparative exercises
Lack of confidence	Positive reinforcement and creation of a supportive learning environment
Limited meeting time	Encourage independent practice at home with family guidance

5. Implications for Future Programs

The success of this initiative provides opportunities for further development in such areas as:

- Learning to Read Syllables and Simple Words
- Introduction to Numbers and Basic Arithmetic Operations
- Learning to write letters and words
- Extension of the project to other regions with illiterate senior citizens.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

Based on the result of implementation of the Sanggar Lentera Programme in Majidi village, it can be concluded that:

- For acquiring fundamental literacy skills in seniors, programs can be effectively accomplished using a structured, patient, and empathetic approach.
- There has been a significant improvement in the literacy skills of seniors over a period of four weeks, from being confused to memorizing all A to Z letters on their own.
- Fundamental literacy education for seniors has been found to benefit from participation-based learning techniques that use low technology, for example, a whiteboard.
- Of course, it has been proven in this project that knowledge has no boundaries when it comes to learning, and that every individual, including seniors with a passion for acquiring knowledge, has a right to education.
- The impact of the Sanggar Lentera Program went beyond mere cognitive, such as literacy, to psychological, including self-confidence, and social, including interaction with seniors.

Recommendations

According to the actual implementation and result of this program, there are a few recommendations to be proposed:

For Programs in the Future:

- Proceed to read a syllable, simple words, and short sentences in the advanced stages of learning.
- Increase the frequency of meetings to 2–3 times per week for an increased pace of learning outcomes.
- Increase the variety of learning media, for example, letter cards and posters and illustrated storybooks.
- Letter learning should be integrated with the participant's daily life context.

For Program Development:

- Expand the program's reach across other neighborhoods in Majidi Village, targeting RT/RW with its illiterate elderly population.
- Engage participants' families as learning partners at home.
- Form independent learning groups that can be sustained beyond the KKN program.
- Train local cadres or volunteers to become elderly literacy tutors.

For Local Government:

- Specific budget allocation for programs that aim for the eradication of illiteracy among seniors.
- Foster policies that facilitate lifelong education for all members of society.
- Make available elder-friendly learning facilities in every village.
- Incorporate senior literacy education into Posyandu Lansia programs and/or regular PKK activities.

For Future Research:

- Carry out studies concerning retention of literacy among seniors in terms of long-term memory.
- Examine issues related to successful literacy acquisition among seniors.
- Develop specialized literacy modules for seniors based on their cognitive and physical traits.
- Study the effects of literacy education initiatives on the lifestyle and autonomy of seniors.

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