

BUILDING BONDS THROUGH PLAY: A COMMUNITY SERVICE IN ENHANCING SOCIAL SKILLS AND TEAMWORK IN EARLY CHILDHOOD AT TK RETNO ASIH TUBAN, EAST JAVA

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ABSTRACT

This community service project aimed to enhance the social skills and teamwork of preschool children at TK Retno Asih in Tuban, East Java, through interactive team-building activities. The focus was on developing key social competencies such as collaboration, empathy, and communication among young learners. The activities, including games like “Hap Hap Air,” “Estafet Jedag Jedug,” and “Kepekaan Pikiran,” were designed to engage children in cooperative tasks that promote motor coordination, concentration, and teamwork. The project followed a participatory approach, involving teachers, parents, and children in the planning and implementation phases. Data collection included post-intervention observations, teacher feedback, and parent surveys to assess the impact of the activities. Results indicated an improvement in children's social interactions, communication skills, and teamwork, demonstrating the effectiveness of play-based learning in fostering essential developmental skills. This initiative underscores the value of collaborative efforts in early childhood education to cultivate a well-rounded, socially competent future generation.

Keywords: *Early Childhood Education, Team-Building, Social Skills, Community Service, Play-Based Learning*

I. INTRODUCTION

Early childhood is a foundational phase in human development, where children begin to cultivate social, emotional, and cognitive skills essential for their future interactions and learning. During this period, children start to explore their environment, build relationships with peers, and learn the value of collaboration and teamwork. However, at TK Retno Asih in Tuban, East Java, observations indicate that many children face difficulties in engaging effectively with their peers. Challenges such as reluctance to communicate, limited sharing behaviors, and difficulties in resolving minor conflicts are common. These issues highlight the need for structured interventions to support the development of social skills and teamwork among early learners. Research underscores that early interventions are crucial in helping children build interpersonal skills that significantly impact their academic and social success later in life (Denham et al., 2015).

The focus of this initiative is to address the gaps in social skill development through structured team-building activities. Team-building games, such as cooperative play and group problem-solving tasks, have been shown to be effective in fostering collaboration, empathy, and communication among children. For instance, Pellegrini and Holmes (2006) emphasized that play-based activities not only enhance social bonding but also provide opportunities for children to practice and internalize social norms. Additionally, Whitebread et al. (2012) highlighted the role of playful learning in improving self-regulation and teamwork, making it an ideal strategy for early childhood education. TK Retno Asih was chosen as the subject of this program due to its potential to benefit from such interventions, as observed through consultations with teachers and initial assessments of the children's social behaviors.

The program's overarching goal is to create an environment where children can learn to work collaboratively while strengthening their interpersonal skills. Structured activities, such as relay games and collaborative puzzles, are designed to help children develop essential skills like communication, empathy, and problem-solving in an enjoyable and age-appropriate manner. Moreover,

these activities are expected to enhance children's motor skills, both fine and gross, as they involve physical engagement that fosters coordination and teamwork. As supported by Vygotsky's (1978) social interactionist theory, such guided, interactive play promotes the internalization of social behaviors and enhances learning through peer interactions.

In addition to addressing immediate developmental needs, this initiative also aims to create long-term social change. By equipping children with foundational social skills, the program seeks to empower them to navigate complex social environments confidently and cooperatively. Teachers and parents are also engaged to ensure the continuity of these practices beyond the classroom, creating a holistic support system for the children. Furthermore, the program aligns with global best practices in early childhood education, which advocate for integrating play-based learning to foster academic, social, and emotional development (Fisher et al., 2011).

II. METHODOLOGY

The methodology employed in this community service program was based on a participatory and collaborative approach involving educators, parents, and children at TK Retno Asih, Tuban, East Java. This approach was chosen to ensure that the intervention addressed the unique needs and expectations of the target community. TK Retno Asih was selected as the location due to its observed challenges in fostering teamwork and social skills among early learners, as well as its openness to adopting innovative learning methods. The participants consisted of children aged 4–6 years, along with their teachers and parents, who played active roles in the planning and execution of the activities. The program aimed to enhance children's social skills and teamwork through a structured sequence of cooperative games and problem-solving tasks.

The planning process began with focus group discussions (FGDs) involving teachers and parents to identify the primary challenges in children's social development and to set clear objectives for the program. These discussions revealed that playful, team-building activities would be most effective in enhancing communication, empathy, and collaboration among the children. During the implementation phase, children participated in activities such as group puzzles and relay games designed to promote these skills. Teachers were trained

through workshops to facilitate these activities effectively, aligning with the principles of play-based learning (Fisher et al., 2011). Monitoring and evaluation were conducted throughout the program by observing children's behavior and collecting feedback from teachers and parents. This iterative process ensured that the activities were adapted to the children's developmental needs and cultural context. Such participatory methods have been shown to enhance program sustainability and community ownership (Meyer et al., 2014).

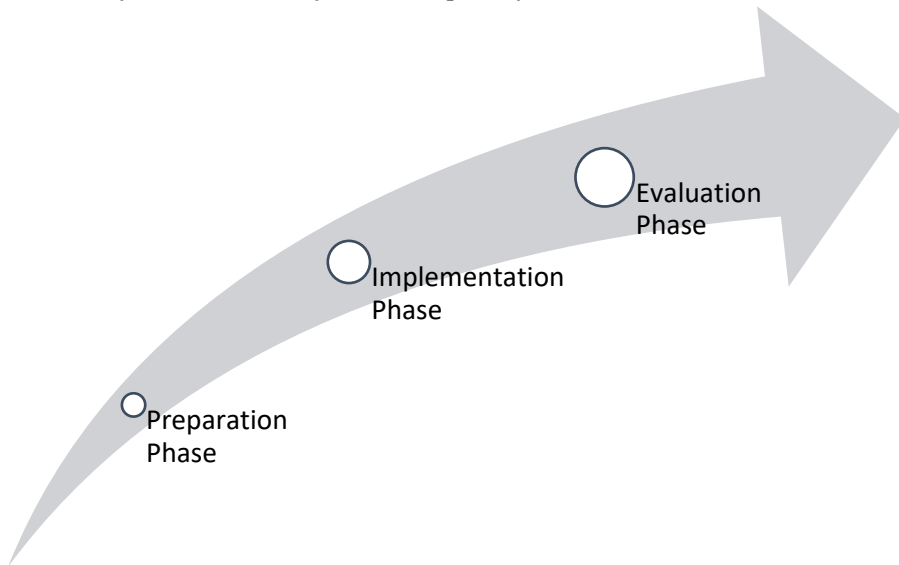


Figure 1. Phases in Conducting the Community Service

III. RESULTS

The preparation phase of the community service program was crucial in ensuring its alignment with the needs and expectations of TK Retno Asih. This phase began with establishing a collaborative partnership with the school, involving key stakeholders such as teachers, parents, and school administrators. Initial meetings focused on discussing the program's objectives, understanding the school's existing challenges in fostering social skills and teamwork, and identifying the resources available for implementation. These discussions laid the groundwork for trust and mutual commitment to the program's success.

Following the establishment of partnerships, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted with teachers and parents to gather insights into the children's behavioral patterns, social interactions, and areas for improvement.

FGDs also provided an opportunity for stakeholders to share their expectations and suggest culturally and contextually relevant activities. Based on the findings, an action plan was developed collaboratively, outlining the goals, timelines, and methodologies for the program. The action plan included detailed descriptions of the cooperative games and problem-solving tasks to be implemented, along with a schedule for teacher training sessions and evaluation activities. This participatory planning process ensured that all stakeholders were engaged and that the program was tailored to the unique needs of TK Retno Asih. As supported by Meyer et al. (2014), involving the community in the planning phase fosters ownership and sustainability of interventions.

The implementation phase of the team-building activities at TK Retno Asih in Tuban, East Java, was designed to foster social skills, teamwork, and emotional development among early childhood learners. This phase included structured and engaging activities tailored to the developmental needs of young children while promoting essential skills such as communication, collaboration, empathy, and problem-solving. Each week focused on a different aspect of social interaction, incorporating games and tasks that blended fun with educational value.



Figure 2. Conducting Hap Hap Air Game

One of the key activities was the Hap Hap Air game, which involved individual representatives from each class. Participants were tasked with blowing a small ball across the surface of water in a cup using their breath. The objective

was to keep the ball afloat and guide it to a designated spot without letting it sink or leave the cup. This game developed motor coordination, concentration, and controlled breathing. It also introduced healthy competition in a structured environment, allowing children to experience the importance of focus and persistence. Each session culminated in a friendly competition between classes, fostering camaraderie and mutual encouragement.

The second activity, *Estafet Jedag Jedug*, was a team relay game emphasizing collaborative effort and precision. Teams competed by transferring rubber bands using straws and completing the task by eating bread within a limited time. This activity demanded teamwork, as children had to work together to complete the relay, and also strengthened their fine motor skills and problem-solving abilities. The sequential nature of the game allowed every team member to contribute to the group's success, instilling a sense of shared responsibility and achievement.



Figure 3. Students of TK Retno Asih were playing *Estafet Jedag Jedug* Game

The final activity, *Kepekaan Pikiran*, focused on building emotional connections and improving concentration through playful interaction between mothers and their children. In this game, children were hidden among their peers, covered with sarongs and masks, while their mothers were tasked with identifying their child using non-verbal cues. The game concluded with a race to dress their child in a shirt while blindfolded, further testing their coordination and emotional bond. This activity emphasized trust, recognition, and attentiveness, strengthening the parent-child relationship in a playful context. It also highlighted the importance of emotional sensitivity and the ability to interpret non-verbal communication.



Figure 4. Both Students and Parents were Playing Kepekaan Pikiran Game

The structured design of these activities ensured that children could gradually develop the targeted skills in a supportive and enjoyable environment. The use of competitive elements combined with teamwork encouraged active participation while minimizing pressure, allowing children to learn at their own pace. This aligns with Vygotsky's theory of social constructivism, which emphasizes the role of social interaction in cognitive development (Vygotsky, 1978). Moreover, the games provided an opportunity for children to apply learned behaviors in practical settings, consistent with experiential learning theories that advocate for active, hands-on engagement as a core component of skill development (Kolb, 1984). By engaging children in these activities, the program successfully created a platform where learning and play intersected, fostering essential life skills in a meaningful and memorable way.

The evaluation phase was a critical component of the team-building program at TK Retno Asih, ensuring that the objectives of fostering social skills, teamwork, and emotional development among children were effectively met. This phase involved a multi-faceted approach to measure the program's impact, utilizing a combination of post-intervention observations, teacher feedback, and parent surveys.

After the conclusion of the activities, the children were observed during regular classroom and play sessions to identify changes in their behavior and social interactions. The focus was on assessing improvements in communication, cooperation, empathy, and problem-solving skills. Observations were conducted systematically by the teaching staff, who used predefined indicators such as the

children's ability to share, take turns, resolve conflicts amicably, and work collaboratively in group tasks. The observational data provided qualitative insights into how the children applied the skills gained from the activities in real-life scenarios, aligning with Dewey's experiential learning framework, which emphasizes learning through active engagement and reflection (Dewey, 1938).

Teachers, as the primary facilitators and daily observers of the children, played a pivotal role in evaluating the program's effectiveness. Structured feedback sessions were conducted to gather their input on the children's progress. Teachers were asked to provide examples of behavioral changes they noticed, such as increased participation in group activities, better emotional regulation, and improved peer relationships. Their feedback also included suggestions for enhancing the program to address specific developmental needs and any challenges encountered during implementation.

To capture the program's impact beyond the school environment, surveys were distributed to parents. These surveys focused on changes in their children's behavior at home, including their willingness to cooperate with siblings, communicate effectively, and demonstrate empathy in family settings. Parents were also asked to share their perceptions of the activities, including their child's enthusiasm for participation and any noticeable improvements in social and emotional skills. The inclusion of parental input provided a holistic perspective, bridging the gap between school and home environments.

Preliminary analysis indicated that the program significantly enhanced children's social skills and teamwork abilities. Teachers noted greater classroom harmony and collaboration, while parents reported positive behavioral changes at home. These results underscore the importance of interactive, play-based learning in early childhood education and affirm the value of involving both educators and parents in the developmental process.

By adopting a structured and inclusive evaluation strategy, the program ensured that its goals were met and provided valuable insights for refining future interventions. This comprehensive approach aligns with best practices in program assessment, emphasizing continuous improvement and evidence-based outcomes (Patton, 2015).

IV. DISCUSSION

The team-building program implemented at TK Retno Asih provided valuable insights into the role of interactive activities in fostering social skills and teamwork among early childhood learners. The post-intervention analysis, supported by observations, teacher feedback, and parent surveys, demonstrated that the activities significantly enhanced children's abilities to collaborate, communicate, and empathize. These findings align with Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which emphasizes the importance of social interaction in cognitive and emotional development (Vygotsky, 1978). Through structured and playful interactions, children developed critical interpersonal skills that are foundational for lifelong learning and adaptability.

The observations highlighted improvements in communication and cooperation, with children showing greater ease in sharing, resolving conflicts, and taking turns. These outcomes resonate with Piaget's theory of play, which suggests that cooperative activities encourage cognitive and moral development by enabling children to navigate social norms and perspectives (Piaget, 1962). Activities like "Hap Hap Air" and "Estafet Jedag Jedug" provided opportunities for children to practice these skills in an engaging and low-pressure environment, consistent with research by Whitebread et al. (2012), which emphasizes the role of play in fostering self-regulation and social competence.

The program also demonstrated a positive influence on emotional regulation and empathy. Games that required teamwork, such as "Kepakaan Pikiran," helped children recognize and respond to the emotions of their peers, aligning with the findings of Denham et al. (2012), which highlight the link between play-based activities and the development of emotional intelligence in young children. The collaborative nature of these activities encouraged children to support one another, promoting a sense of community and mutual understanding.

Feedback from parents and teachers revealed a shared perception of positive behavioral changes, indicating that the skills learned during the program extended beyond the classroom. This outcome underscores the importance of involving families in early childhood interventions, as highlighted by Epstein's Framework of Six Types of Involvement (Epstein, 2001). The alignment of home and school environments created a supportive ecosystem that reinforced the program's objectives.

The program's success mirrors findings from previous studies, such as those by Frost et al. (2012), which underscore the importance of structured play in developing motor, cognitive, and social skills. Additionally, a study by Pellegrini and Smith (1998) supports the idea that physical and collaborative activities, like those included in this program, are instrumental in promoting prosocial behavior and reducing aggression among peers.

While the program achieved its objectives, challenges such as varying levels of participation and initial resistance from some children highlighted the need for adaptive strategies. These findings align with studies by Bodrova and Leong (2007), which emphasize the importance of scaffolding in supporting children who may struggle with new social contexts.

The team-building program at TK Retno Asih effectively demonstrated the transformative power of play-based learning in early childhood education. By integrating theory with practical application, the program not only enhanced the children's social and emotional skills but also reinforced the critical role of collaboration between educators and families. These findings provide a robust foundation for future interventions, emphasizing the need for scalable, inclusive, and culturally responsive approaches in early childhood development.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The team-building program conducted at TK Retno Asih proved to be highly effective in enhancing essential social skills and teamwork among young children. By incorporating interactive games that promoted communication, cooperation, and empathy, the program allowed children to develop vital interpersonal skills in a fun and supportive environment. Post-intervention data collected through observations, teacher feedback, and parent surveys revealed significant improvements in the children's ability to collaborate, regulate their emotions, and engage socially with their peers. These results are consistent with developmental theories, such as those proposed by Vygotsky and Piaget, which emphasize the role of social interaction and play in early childhood education. The active participation of teachers and parents further supported the positive changes observed, highlighting the importance of a community-based approach to early childhood development. The activities also addressed both fine and gross motor skill development, offering children opportunities for self-regulation, which are critical for their future success in both academic and social settings.

Given the positive impact of this program, it is recommended that it be expanded to other early childhood centers in the region, as the integration of team-building activities can foster essential social and emotional skills in a broader student population. To ensure the program's sustainability, it is crucial to provide continuous training for teachers and caregivers on how to implement and adapt these activities to meet the developmental needs of all children. Maintaining strong communication with parents will also help reinforce the skills learned in the classroom at home. Additionally, more inclusive and adaptive strategies should be incorporated to support children who may initially struggle with group activities, ensuring that the program is accessible to everyone. Long-term impact should be monitored through follow-up assessments, which will provide valuable insights into the lasting effects of the program on children's social and emotional development. Furthermore, expanding the scope of activities to include aspects such as conflict resolution, leadership, and self-expression, along with involving community members, could further enrich the children's learning experience and strengthen community bonds. By following these recommendations, early childhood education programs can create lasting positive impacts on children's overall development, laying a strong foundation for their future academic and social well-being.

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