

Analysis of the Role of Students as Catalysts in Improving Nutritional Literacy Towards a Sustainable Stunting-Free Jatisari Village

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Abstract: Malnutrition, including stunting, is an urgent health issue in Indonesia, particularly in rural areas such as Jatisari Village. The high prevalence of stunting affects the quality of human resources and long-term development. As catalysts, university students play a strategic role in driving nutrition literacy programs through an integrated and comprehensive approach. This study aims to enhance students' contributions in strengthening nutrition literacy in Jatisari Village through a community engagement program involving active participation from various stakeholders, including local residents, healthcare workers, and village authorities. To achieve detailed and comprehensive research results, the methods employed include field surveys to identify community needs, in-depth interviews to explore challenges faced by local residents, and the implementation of collaboratively designed nutrition education programs. The results indicate that student involvement in nutrition education programs successfully increased community knowledge about healthy eating patterns within the first three months of implementation. The program also enhanced consciousness of the importance of sustainable stunting prevention efforts. In conclusion, students significantly contribute to the structured advancement of nutrition literacy programs, supporting efforts to create a stunting-free Jatisari Village sustainably. This survey highlights that cross-sectoral collaboration with active student participation can create extensive and long-term positive impacts on rural communities.

1 INTRODUCTION

Stunting has become one of the most significant health challenges threatening Indonesia, particularly in rural areas (Scheffler et al., 2020). Indonesian Health Survey (2023) stated that the proportion of children under five at risk of stunting in Jember Regency reached 29.7%, making it the fourth highest in East Java Province. Stunting has adverse effects on children's physical growth and intelligence, which in turn impacts the quality of human resources and long-term economic development (Alam et al., 2020; Azriani et al., 2024). Jatisari Village is one example of a rural area facing stunting problems, even though it is rich in natural resources such as rice fields, agricultural products, and livestock. This issue is caused by the community's limited access to education and literacy resources. Approximately 55% of Indonesians experience functional illiteracy (World Bank, 2018). Functional illiteracy can be associated with low levels of education and income. Limited literacy skills can restrict job and income opportunities, ultimately affecting a family's ability to provide nutritious food and a supportive environment for children's growth. In addressing

this challenge, a collaborative approach involving all stakeholders including the community, health workers, and village government, is required. Therefore, promoting nutrition literacy programs at the village level is essential to reduce stunting rates (Petrika et al., 2023).

Students serve as key catalysts in driving community empowerment programs, particularly in improving nutrition literacy (Anjaswarni et al., 2022). Through their knowledge, students can develop and implement programs based on holistic and integrated approaches. Sufficient nutrition literacy enhances people's awareness of the importance of balanced eating habits and motivates positive behavioral changes in selecting nutritious foods within the community. (Saleh et al., 2024). With an approach that actively involves the community, these programs can address various aspects, ranging from daily dietary habits to education on the importance of nutritional health for children's growth. The role of students as facilitators in nutrition literacy programs is highly relevant, as they can serve as a bridge between the community, health workers, and the government. With their knowledge, students are capable of designing programs that align with local needs and

support the implementation of community-based health policies.

A nutrition literacy program involving students can help improve the community's understanding of proper nutrient intake and encourage the integration of this knowledge into the daily lives of rural residents. An effective nutrition literacy program not only educates the community about the importance of appropriate nutritional intake but also integrates this knowledge into everyday life (Astikasari et al., 2023). A quick and effective effort involves promoting innovative training in preparing supplementary foods based on local ingredients designed to harness food resources available around the village. Those ingredients should be easily accessible to the community. Collaboration between students, the community, and health workers will strengthen the program's impact, making it more sustainable and effective (Sari et al., 2023). Thus, achieving a stunting-free Jatisari Village is not an impossible goal.

In addition, a nutrition literacy program integrated with the village's posyandu (community health post) facilitates the distribution of information and health services to the community. This integration can also enhance the function of posyandu in stunting prevention by facilitating consistent monitoring and evaluation of children's growth. The success of such activities depends on the collective cooperation of all parties, including students who act as facilitators and key drivers (Setiawan et al., 2024). Therefore, there is an urgency to evaluate the contribution of students to the success of this nutrition literacy program, as well as to identify the challenges and obstacles encountered during its implementation. This evaluation serves as the foundation for developing improved programs that can be adopted in other regions.

This survey research aims to evaluate the strategic role of students as catalysts in the nutrition literacy improvement program in Jatisari Village through a holistic and integrated approach. By emphasizing cross-sector collaboration, this program not only focuses on nutrition education but also prioritizes the utilization of local food resources and the promotion of healthy behavioral changes within the community (Coordinating Ministry for Human Development and Cultural Affairs, 2024). The results of this study are expected to provide a concrete overview of the effectiveness of students in empowering communities to address stunting issues sustainably. In addition to contributing to the reduction of stunting rates, the program is also expected to foster a shared understanding of the importance of mainstreaming healthy behaviors that can be passed down from

generation to generation (Yani et al., 2023). Thus, Jatisari Village is expected to become a national model for stunting eradication efforts through community-based empowerment.s.

2 METHOD

This survey employed a qualitative descriptive approach with a descriptive method to examine the contribution of students as agents of change in the nutrition literacy improvement program in Jatisari Village (Marhaeni et al., 2023). The qualitative approach was chosen because the main focus of this survey is to explore the experiences, perceptions, and roles of students in the implementation of the nutrition literacy improvement program. In addition, this survey aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the factors that support the program's success as well as the challenges faced in achieving its long-term goal—creating a stunting-free Jatisari Village.

This survey was conducted in Jatisari Village because the village has a pressing need for improving nutrition literacy amidst various health challenges faced by its residents (De Sanctis et al., 2021). Although the village already has the Rumah Desa Sehat (Healthy Village House/RDS) program, this has not made the village free from stunting, as the program mainly focuses on high-risk pregnant women and children already identified as stunted (Suarayasa et al., 2024). Therefore, students play a vital role in community empowerment efforts through counseling and education for RDS cadres and the residents of Jatisari Village to enhance their understanding of the significance of balanced nutritional intake and healthy eating behaviors. Collaboration between researchers, students, and local communities was carried out to evaluate the impact of the nutrition literacy program on changes in dietary behavior in the villagers' daily lives, with the goal of achieving long-term sustainability in improving nutritional well-being (Gharpure et al., 2021).

Primary data were obtained from students who participated in the 2024 PPK Ormawa BEM FK UNEJ program, consisting of students from Faculty of Dentistry, Faculty of Medicine, Faculty of Public Health, and Faculty of Teacher Training and Education (PPID Jember Regency, 2024). The selection of students was based on their involvement in community service activities related to nutritional health (Mulyaningsih et al., 2021). Secondary data were obtained from participants, including residents of Jatisari Village, Posyandu cadres, and RDS cadres. Participants were selected

through purposive sampling based on criteria of villagers who actively participated in the nutrition education programs conducted by students. Data were obtained using a combination of qualitative methods, including in-depth interviews to explore participants' perspectives, focus group discussions (FGDs) to capture collective insights, and direct observation to closely examine the implementation process of the program in real settings (Etrawati et al., 2023).

Thus, the data collection process was carried out using three methods: interviews, observation, and documentation (Lestari, 2023). In-depth interviews were conducted with students, village residents, and local officials to obtain diverse perspectives on the role of students in the program and its impact on the community's nutritional knowledge (Kamaruzaman et al., 2023; Mediani et al., 2022). Focus group discussions (FGDs) were used to explore community views on nutrition literacy and the role of students in driving change (Raiten et al., 2020). In addition, direct observation of nutrition education activities was conducted to assess the extent of the program's success and to determine whether participants had understood the material presented (Pradana Putri et al., 2021). The survey was conducted from June 2024 to August 2024.

Data analysis employed a thematic analysis technique by identifying patterns or themes that emerged from interviews, FGDs, and observations (Komaruzaman et al., 2023). The collected data were categorized into key themes such as student contributions, community behavioral changes, and challenges encountered during program implementation. The results of the analysis were then compared with the program's objectives to evaluate the effectiveness of student involvement in improving nutrition literacy in the village. The approach used in this survey aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the role of students as agents of change in community empowerment efforts related to nutritional health.

3 RESULT

The nutrition literacy improvement program implemented in Jatisari Village has had a significant impact on the community's knowledge regarding the importance of balanced nutrition and healthy eating patterns. Based on interviews with village residents involved in the program, the majority of participants showed improved understanding of various nutritional aspects, including the nutritional needs of children, pregnant women, adolescent girls, and prospective brides (Vaivada et al., 2020).

Previously, many community members lacked adequate knowledge about nutritious food types, often neglecting nutritional balance in their daily diets (Azzahra et al., 2024).

The implementation of the nutrition literacy program in Jatisari Village showed significant results in improving community knowledge related to nutrition and stunting prevention. According to field surveys, the community's nutrition literacy level increased by 21.17% after three months of program implementation. Before the program began, only 50.76% of respondents had a basic understanding of healthy eating patterns, while after the program, this figure rose to 71.93%. These results indicate that a collaborative educational approach is effective in raising community awareness. This improvement was supported by regular counseling sessions involving students as the main facilitators (Table 1).

Table 1: Comparison of Community Knowledge Percentage on Nutrition and Stunting Prevention (Falah et al., 2024).

Test	Average
Pretest	50.76
Post test	71.93
Differences	21,17

The role of students as agents of change was clearly evident in these findings. Students served as primary information providers and facilitators who effectively bridged the gap between medical knowledge and the community's daily practices. Through their involvement, the program successfully created a conducive environment for behavioral change toward healthier eating habits.

The local food-based cooking training became one of the key components of this program, directly influencing the community's dietary patterns (Figure 1). Based on interview results, many respondents acknowledged that the training provided them with new ideas for processing local food ingredients into more nutritious meals (Bassey et al., 2022). For example, 70% of the training participants began practicing the recipes taught once they returned home. Consequently, there was an increase in the consumption of nutritious foods, particularly among children and pregnant women (Kamaruzaman et al., 2024; Purba et al., 2023). Moreover, this training also supported the village's food security by optimizing the use of local resources (Hambali et al., 2023).



Figure 1: Implementation of Supplementary Feeding Preparation Training at the Jatisari Village Hall, Jenggawah Subdistrict, Jember Regency

The integration of the nutrition literacy program with posyandu (community health post) activities also showed significant results in supporting child health monitoring. Posyandu has become a more structured center for the distribution of nutrition information and health services (Laksono et al., 2022; Mustakim et al., 2022). The posyandu cadres involved in the program reported a 30% increase in the number of visits by mothers and children compared to the previous period. This indicates that cross-sector collaboration, including the role of students, has successfully expanded community access to health services. Moreover, this program has strengthened the function of posyandu as a center for continuous nutrition education.

The success of this program is also reflected in the increased public awareness of the importance of comprehensive stunting prevention. As many as 85% of respondents from distributed questionnaires admitted that the program broadened their understanding of the long-term impacts of stunting on child growth. This awareness was reflected in behavioral changes, such as being more selective in choosing food ingredients and routinely monitoring their children's growth and development (UNICEF, 2024). Students, acting as agents of change, played a strategic role in assisting the community throughout this process (Figure 2). This demonstrates that community empowerment involving students can create a sustainable positive impact.

Nevertheless, the program faced several challenges, particularly regarding limited resources and coordination among stakeholders. Some village cadres reported difficulties in independently managing nutrition gardens after the training concluded. Additionally, not all community members could participate actively due to time constraints and daily responsibilities. These obstacles indicate the need to strengthen cadre capacity and provide incentives to encourage community participation. Therefore, the sustainability of the program requires further support from the village government and related institutions.

From a methodological perspective, the participatory approach implemented in this program

proved effective in enhancing community engagement. Surveys, interviews, and participatory observations provided a comprehensive understanding of community needs, which served as the foundation for program design. Involving the community from the early stages fostered a sense of ownership toward the program, motivating them to participate more actively (Ponum et al., 2020). Furthermore, the analysis results showed that cross-sector collaborative approaches increased the efficiency and effectiveness of the program. Hence, this approach can be recommended for implementation in other regions facing similar issues

Theoretically, the findings of this survey reinforce previous literature stating that nutrition literacy is one of the key factors in stunting prevention (Soekatri et al., 2020). The knowledge provided through this program has been proven to positively change community behavior in the short term. This aligns with the theory of community empowerment, which suggests that education based on local needs is more effective in creating change (Noviansyah et al., 2022). This study also highlights the importance of students' roles as agents of change in community empowerment. Therefore, nutrition literacy programs serve as a strategic solution for eliminating stunting in Indonesia.



Figure 2: Assistance in the Implementation of the Deployment of Cadres for the Student Organization Capacity Strengthening Program

The findings of this survey make an important contribution to the implementation of public health programs at the village level. The experience from Jatisari Village can serve as a model for other regions, with modifications tailored to local needs (Bhutta et al., 2022). The achievements of this program highlight that strong collaboration between students, community members, health personnel, and the village government can generate meaningful, wide-reaching, and sustainable impacts on public health. Moreover, the findings from this study serve as a valuable reference for designing future initiatives that adopt a more comprehensive, integrated, and innovative approach to improving community nutrition and well-being (Santosa et al.,

2022). This survey research is relevant for improving public health and supporting the achievement of sustainable development goals in Indonesia.

4 CONCLUSION

Students play a strategic role as catalysts in sustainable stunting elimination efforts, particularly through approaches focused on nutrition literacy and community empowerment. With their diverse academic backgrounds, they are able to provide holistic education from the importance of a healthy diet and methods of processing local food ingredients to the adoption of healthy lifestyles. In the program implemented in Jatisari Village, student involvement extends beyond serving as facilitators of health education; they also act as innovators who create solutions based on community needs. The sustainability of stunting elimination requires the active contribution of students as agents of change who can bridge scientific knowledge with real-world community practices. Through a collaborative approach, students are able to strengthen community awareness and commitment to collectively build a generation free from stunting, supporting the creation of a healthier, more self-reliant, and higher-quality society.

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