



Establishment of Free Academic Tutoring for Children by Religious Extension Education Students in Aek Muara Pinang Urban Village, South Sibolga District-Sibolga

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ABSTRACT

The commercialization of non-formal education services has created a wide gap in learning access for the lower class, including in Aek Muara Pinak Village, Sibolga Selatan District, Sibolga City. The economic limitations of a community dominated by informal sector workers marginalize their children from accessing paid tutoring centers (bimbel), potentially decreasing their learning motivation and academic achievement, and triggering an intergenerational poverty cycle. This descriptive qualitative research aims to analyze the establishment process, learning strategies, motivational impacts, and operational challenges of the free tutoring program in this area. Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation involving administrators, tutors, parents, and students. The results indicate that the establishment of this tutoring center is an innovative, participatory approach to non-formal education access that eliminates economic barriers. In terms of implementation, tutors adopt a humanistic approach and learning differentiation that not only transfers knowledge (cognitive) but also integrates character building (affective) through habituation. The existence of this tutoring center successfully fulfills the psychological needs of the students, thereby increasing their intrinsic learning motivation. However, on the other hand, the sustainability of this program faces critical challenges, such as the high turnover rate of volunteer tutors and limited operational funds. This study recommends the need for formalization of strategic partnerships between initiators, village government, and other stakeholders to ensure the sustainability of an inclusive educational ecosystem at the grassroots level.

Keywords: Free Tutoring, Educational Equity, Non-Formal Education, Learning Motivation, Strategic Partnership.

INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental human right that plays a strategic role in shaping the quality of human resources and a nation's civilization. Article 31 of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia mandates that every citizen has the right to education and that the government is obligated to fund it. Although the government has made maximum efforts to provide equitable access to formal education through the twelve-year compulsory education program, the reality on the ground shows that ensuring equal quality in education remains a highly complex challenge. Success in the educational process is not determined solely by the availability of formal school infrastructure; it also depends heavily on the students' ability to absorb and comprehend learning materials. In the modern era, the limited time available for study at school is often insufficient to accommodate the individual needs of students, who possess varying levels of comprehension and learning speeds.

These limitations within the formal education system have given rise to the proliferation of private tutoring centers that supplement the teaching and learning process outside of school hours. However, socio-economic realities reveal that private tutoring has lost its essence as a means of equalizing access to education; instead, it has evolved into a commercial commodity accessible only to upper-middle-class families. The high costs associated with enrollment and monthly fees render these institutions a luxury service beyond the reach of the lower class. This situation directly creates a widening educational inequality gap: children from affluent families can maximize their academic potential through supplementary instruction, whereas children from underprivileged families are forced to rely solely on classroom teaching without any additional academic support.

The impact of this inequality is particularly pronounced in urban areas characterized by high socio-economic diversity, such as Aek Muara Pinak Urban Village in South Sibolga District, Sibolga City. As an urban village characterized by high population density, Aek Muara Pinak is home to residents with diverse livelihoods, though the majority work in the informal sector, such as casual day laborers, fishermen, and small-scale traders. These occupations are typically marked by unstable and generally low incomes, compelling families to prioritize spending on basic necessities like food, clothing, and housing. Consequently, supplementary expenses including costs that support a child's education, such as purchasing supplementary textbooks or enrolling in tutoring services are relegated to the very bottom of the priority list or even disregarded entirely.

The direct impact of the parents' economic hardship is clearly evident in the academic and psychological well-being of children in Aek Muara Pinak Village. Many struggle to keep up with school lessons, particularly in subjects perceived as difficult, such as Mathematics, English, and Natural Sciences. Furthermore, the low level of formal education among most parents in the area leaves them feeling ill-equipped to guide their children or assist with homework. This lack of academic support at home is compounded by an environment unconducive to study, characterized by noise, cramped living spaces, and a scarcity of literacy-supporting resources. Over time, this situation erodes the children's learning motivation, fosters a sense of falling behind their peers, and poses a significant risk of lowering their academic performance.

If this situation persists without external intervention, it risks creating an intergenerational cycle of poverty that is extremely difficult to break. Children who lack adequate academic support tend to achieve poor grades, ultimately limiting their options

for pursuing higher education. Restricted access to higher education closes off opportunities for decent future employment, trapping them in economic circumstances similar to or worse than those of their parents. Moreover, unstructured time after school if not filled with positive, productive activities makes children vulnerable to negative behaviors. These include associating with the wrong peer groups, developing gadget addictions, and engaging in juvenile delinquency that harms both their own futures and the surrounding community.

Given these challenges, the establishment of a free tutoring program for children in Aek Muara Pinak Village serves as a crucial and highly targeted solution. This program is designed as a social intervention aimed at bridging the gap in access to non-formal education by eliminating costs that burden the community. This free tutoring initiative serves not only as a platform for knowledge transfer, helping students grasp school curriculum material but also plays a dual role in character building, instilling moral values, and providing the motivation children need to remain enthusiastic about pursuing their aspirations. The volunteers and tutors involved are expected to serve as role models who inspire the children and broaden their horizons, demonstrating that economic limitations need not be a barrier to achieving the highest levels of education.

Consequently, this study examines the establishment of a free tutoring program in Aek Muara Pinak Urban Village (Sibolga Selatan District, Sibolga City) as a concrete effort to realize educational equity at the grassroots level. This paper is significant as it systematically documents the entire process from planning and implementation to the challenges encountered involved in establishing and running this community-based social program.

METHODS

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research design. A qualitative approach was selected because the study aims to describe and analyze in depth the process of establishing a free tutoring program covering the planning, implementation, and evaluation stages in Aek Muara Pinak Urban Village. The research was conducted in Aek Muara Pinak Urban Village, South Sibolga District, Sibolga City. This location was chosen purposively as it is the site where the free tutoring program the object of this study was established.

Research subjects were selected using a purposive sampling technique (selecting informants based on specific criteria relevant to the research problem). The subjects in this study consist of: (1) The administrators or program coordinators of the free tutoring service; (2) Volunteer teachers/tutors actively teaching in the program; (3) Parents or guardians of the children participating in the tutoring; and (4) The children participating in the tutoring (representing the beneficiaries). The number of informants was not rigidly predetermined but relied on the principle of data saturation—meaning data collection from new informants ceased once the information obtained became repetitive and no new themes emerged.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Establishment Process and Innovation in Non-Formal Education Access

The research findings indicate that the establishment of the Free Tutoring Program in Aek Muara Pinak Urban Village serves as a critical response to the phenomenon of the

increasingly massive commercialization of non-formal education services. The establishment process was not merely technical involving the preparation of a physical learning space but entailed intensive social negotiation with local village officials and community leaders. The initiative began with a participatory problem-identification process, wherein the initiators went directly into the field to map the residents' socio-economic conditions and recognized the significant disparity in access to education within the coastal community. This bottom-up approach is crucial for fostering a sense of community ownership over the program; it ensures the tutoring center does not appear as an abrupt intrusion disrupting the local social fabric, but is instead embraced as a collective solution born from the community's own initiative. Theoretically, this tutoring center reinforces the function of non-formal education as defined by Coombs and Ahmed (1974) whereby institutions operating outside the formal school system flexibly complement the mainstream education system, particularly by allowing for the individualization of the learning process. In Aek Muara Pinak Urban Village, this free tutoring service acts as a tangible mechanism for equalizing learning opportunities for children from low-income families who are systematically excluded from paid tutoring services. The center successfully bridges a gap in educational services long overlooked by policymakers; children struggling with school material are no longer resigned to falling behind but instead find a safe space to ask questions, engage in discussion, and review lessons without the burden of costs that their low-income parents would otherwise have to bear. The key innovation of this initiative lies not only in the removal of economic barriers (tuition fees) but also in a highly flexible curriculum and schedule tailored to the local community's actual needs. This aligns with the concepts of inclusive, learner-centered education (Rogers, 2004). Rather than adhering to the rigid schedules of formal schools, learning sessions are designed for the late afternoon or evening, accommodating parents' work schedules and the children's free time following a full day of school. Furthermore, the instructional material goes beyond the standard school syllabus, integrating lessons with the community's daily life such as applying mathematics to fish trading transactions or linking literacy skills to the tourism potential of Sibolga's coastal area. Thus, this innovation in non-formal educational access has succeeded in breaking the dominance of the capitalist education model, transforming the tutoring paradigm from a mere "value-added industry" into a "social infrastructure" that humanizes and empowers the lower class.

Learning and Character-Building Strategies

Regarding implementation, the discussion reveals that the teaching methods employed by volunteer tutors do not rely on conventional, teacher-centered pedagogical approaches; instead, they adopt andragogical and humanistic approaches. Drawing on the views of Knowles et al. (2015), a humanistic approach was selected as the primary foundation for learning, even though the learners are children. This paradigm stems from the awareness that children in Aek Muara Pinak Village often carry psychological burdens specifically academic pressure from formal schooling. Consequently, tutors do not simply "dump" subject matter onto the students; rather, they begin sessions by de-escalating fears and alleviating academic fatigue. In practice, this approach is realized through dialogic communication based on equality, where the tutor and learner are not separated

by rigid hierarchies but stand on equal footing as fellow human beings interacting within a shared learning space.

Furthermore, this humanistic approach is intensively implemented to establish emotional bonds first, given that many learners suffer from academic trauma or feelings of inferiority due to consistently below-average school performance. Tutors play a crucial role as empathetic listeners who refrain from immediate judgment when a child fails to answer even basic questions. This bonding process is key to opening the children's hearts and minds, allowing them to feel valued as unique individuals with their own potential, rather than merely as empty vessels to be filled with academic formulas regardless of their mental readiness.

In the process of knowledge transfer, tutors consistently act as facilitators who adapt to each child's learning pace. Because the number of students per study group is kept proportionate, tutors can implement differentiated instruction. Children who grasp the material quickly are given additional challenges or invited to assist their peers (peer tutoring), while those who learn more slowly receive extra individual guidance until they fully understand the concepts. This strategy ensures that no child is left behind during learning sessions, transforming the learning process into an enjoyable exploration free from the rigid time pressures often found in formal classrooms.

Beyond the cognitive aspect, this tutoring program successfully integrates character building (the affective domain) organically by instilling values such as discipline, responsibility, and honesty. This character development is not taught through lectures but rather through habituation such as the requirement to independently complete and submit homework, asking for permission to leave the room, and maintaining the cleanliness of the shared learning space. This approach aligns closely with Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational philosophy: Ing Ngarso Sung Tuladha, Ing Madya Mangun Karsa, Tut Wuri Handayani. As analyzed by Tilaar (2015), this philosophy is translated into the tutoring practice: tutors do not merely lecture from the front but lead by example through disciplined behavior, foster the child's learning initiative from within the group (Mangun Karsa), and provide encouragement from behind (Handayani) when children face difficulties.

Motivational Impact and Improvement in Children's Achievement

A key finding in this discussion is the significant increase in learning motivation among the children participating in the tutoring program. To understand this phenomenon, Maslow's hierarchy of needs framework (cited in Huitt, 2007) is highly relevant. Children from low-income families often struggle to meet basic needs for safety and belonging within an academic context, as they feel alienated from peers who can afford paid tutoring. Before one can reach the pinnacle of self-actualization which, in this case, signifies academic achievement these basic psychological needs must first be met. The free tutoring program serves as an ecosystem that fills this psychological void, offering a sense of security that they can continue to learn without the burden of costs their parents cannot afford. A free tutoring environment that is conducive, encouraging, and free from financial pressure has proven successful in meeting children's needs for esteem. Praise from tutors for their study efforts even for minor achievements gradually erodes the deep-seated feelings of inferiority they previously harbored. Children who were once passive, prone to keeping their heads down, and reluctant to complete school

assignments gradually displayed remarkable enthusiasm. They began arriving early at the tutoring site, bringing their textbooks without being prompted, and showing cheerful expressions during study sessions. This behavioral shift serves as a powerful non-numerical indicator of a paradigm shift in the children's attitude toward learning transforming it from a burden into something they look forward to.

While the cognitive impact such as improved report card grades in formal schooling—requires a relatively long time to be quantitatively measured, the affective impact is already tangible and significant. This impact manifests as the confidence to ask questions of their school teachers, consistency in completing homework without parental reprimand, and the emerging habit of reading during leisure time. These affective changes are, in fact, a necessary prerequisite for cognitive improvement. Once fear and shyness are overcome, the brain's capacity to absorb subject matter increases dramatically, ultimately leading to an automatic rise in academic performance.

Operational Challenges and Volunteer Management

Despite the undeniable positive impact, this study also critically examines the complex operational obstacles involved in establishing and sustaining free tutoring programs. The most fundamental challenge lies in human resource sustainability, particularly regarding the high turnover rate among volunteer tutors. This aligns with the characteristics of volunteerism described by Hustinx et al. (2010), where modern voluntary service is often temporary, episodic, or reactive to specific issues rather than a structured, long-term commitment. Many volunteers begin with great enthusiasm but gradually withdraw for various personal reasons, leaving a void in teaching staff that directly disrupts the continuity of the established learning process.

The primary cause of this volunteer fluctuation is unavoidable scheduling conflicts. Given that the majority of volunteer teachers are university students, they frequently face scheduling conflicts between their demanding academic timetables ranging from classes and campus organizational activities to midterms and thesis work and their tutoring commitments. During critical academic periods, the volunteer tutoring role is often the first priority to be sacrificed. Beyond time constraints, there are challenges regarding the volunteers' pedagogical capacity; not all students with the desire to serve possess adequate teaching competence, necessitating ongoing training in teaching methodology a difficult undertaking given the organizers' limited resources.

In addition to human resource issues, limited operational funding poses a constant structural challenge that threatens the program's sustainability. Free tutoring programs require regular funding for facility maintenance, the purchase of educational aids (such as whiteboards, markers, and erasers), the printing of student worksheets, and the provision of light refreshments for the learners. The absence of monthly fees from parents means the program's cash flow relies entirely on initial funds from the initiators or highly unpredictable spontaneous donations. This lack of funding often stifles tutors' creativity in delivering material due to the limited availability of learning aids.

When examined through the lens of Resource Dependency Theory (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003), these limitations in facilities and funding reveal that non-profit organizations like this free tutoring program occupy a highly vulnerable position. The theory posits that an organization cannot generate all the resources it requires internally, making it heavily dependent on resource exchanges with the external environment. In this context, the

sustainability of the tutoring program in Aek Muara Pinak relies heavily on external support, including permits and facility usage granted by the Aek Muara Pinak Urban Village administration, material assistance from the private sector, and the generosity of individual donors. If any of these external support links were to be severed, the very existence of the free tutoring program would be immediately jeopardized; therefore, formalizing strategic partnerships such as through a memorandum of understanding is essential to ensure the program does not rely entirely on a precarious voluntary basis.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings and discussion, it can be concluded that the establishment of the Free Tutoring Program in Aek Muara Pinak Urban Village represents a crucial social innovation in addressing the commercialization of non-formal education. The program successfully bridges the educational access gap for children from economically disadvantaged families by eliminating cost barriers and implementing a humanistic, contextual learning approach. This tutoring center serves not only as a space for cognitive knowledge transfer but also plays a significant role in character building and meeting children's psychological needs. The most tangible impact of this intervention is the increase in students' intrinsic learning motivation, evidenced by reduced academic trauma, greater confidence in asking questions, and the development of independent study habits previously hindered by family and economic constraints.

On the other hand, this study reveals that the program's sustainability faces serious structural challenges, particularly regarding the fluctuation of human resources (volunteer tutors) and limited operational funds. Reliance on external support demonstrates that the free tutoring program cannot operate autonomously based solely on volunteer spirit. Therefore, strategic measures are required—such as formalizing partnerships (MoUs) with the local village government, the private sector (via CSR), and educational communities to establish sustainable funding structures and a system for tutor succession. In this way, the free tutoring program in Aek Muara Pinak can evolve from a temporary solution into a permanent, inclusive community educational infrastructure capable of breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty in Sibolga City.

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