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Strengthening School-Age Children's Creativity Through Visual Literacy in Art-Based Creative Activities at the Kebon Sirih Child-Friendly Integrated Public Space, Jakarta

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Abstract

The Kebon Sirih Child-Friendly Integrated Public Space (RPTRA) in Jakarta has the potential to serve as a nonformal learning space for school-age children; however, it is still used mainly as a play area, so activities that develop creativity and visual literacy remain limited. This community service program aimed to enhance children's creativity, visual literacy, and expressive abilities through art-based creative activities. The partner was the management of RPTRA Kebon Sirih, and the participants were elementary and junior high school students. The program applied Participatory Action Research (PAR) combined with experiential learning, comprising needs identification, program planning, socialization, creative workshops, visual literacy mentoring, evaluation, and sustainability planning. The workshops included bookmark making, mask painting, macramé phone straps, and pipe-cleaner flowers, adjusted to participants' age. Program success was assessed through observation of participant engagement, documentation of artworks, and evaluation of the learning process. The results showed that participants were able to produce creative works, recognize basic visual elements, and communicate ideas through their works, and they demonstrated greater confidence, creativity, and active participation. The program also produced an art-based creative activity module that enables RPTRA managers to organize educational activities independently and sustainably.

Keywords: child-friendly public space, children's creativity, experiential learning, learning by doing, visual literacy

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INTRODUCTION

The Kebon Sirih Child-Friendly Integrated Public Space (*Ruang Publik Terpadu Ramah Anak*, RPTRA) in Jakarta is one of the public facilities provided by the Provincial Government of DKI Jakarta as a space for social interaction, education, and recreation for the community, particularly children and families (Rakhman et al., 2025; Suprapti & Pamungkas, 2022) . Geographically, RPTRA Kebon Sirih is located in an urban area with a relatively high population density and a heterogeneous community in terms of social, economic, and cultural backgrounds. This condition gives RPTRA Kebon Sirih considerable potential as a center for empowering school-age children in an urban setting, making it highly relevant to be developed through

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an approach based on art and visual literacy (Franzia et al., 2021; Prasetya et al., 2023).



Figure 1. Current Condition of RPTRA Kebon Sirih (Source: Authors' documentation)

Based on existing conditions, RPTRA Kebon Sirih has been used as a playground, a venue for light sports, and a place for incidental events such as competitions and commemorations of national holidays (Magang, 2022). Nevertheless, its use as an educational space oriented toward developing children's creativity, visual literacy, and thinking skills has not been optimal. Structured and sustained art-based activities remain limited in terms of frequency, methods, and the availability of facilitators competent in art and creative education.



Figure 2. Activities at RPTRA Kebon Sirih (Source: Authors' documentation)

School-age children, who are the main users of the RPTRA, generally come from urban environments with very high visual exposure, such as digital media, gadgets, advertisements, and social media. Unfortunately, this high level of visual exposure has not been matched by adequate visual literacy. Children tend to be passive consumers of visual content without the ability to understand the meanings, messages, and values it contains, let alone to express their ideas creatively through art media. This affects their critical and imaginative thinking skills as well as their confidence in expressing themselves.

From the perspective of the community and the RPTRA management, limited resources are one of the main problems. RPTRA managers generally do not have a structured art development program and have not been equipped with modules or methods for creative activities suited to the characteristics of school-age children. In addition, the involvement of external parties such as academics and art practitioners remains sporadic and has not been integrated into medium- or long-term programs.

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Another problem identified is the absence of an art-based creative activity model that can accommodate the needs of school-age children in an inclusive, enjoyable, and educational manner. In fact, art activities have great potential as a medium for developing children's creativity, visual literacy, cooperation, and character. Without appropriate program interventions, the RPTRA risks remaining merely a physical space rather than functioning fully as an alternative learning space that empowers children and the community sustainably.

A digital literacy program at RPTRA Mangga Ulir demonstrated that an RPTRA can be an appropriate venue for digital literacy programs for children, adolescents, and parents. The program resulted in improved understanding of digital literacy, better information verification skills, and an environment more supportive of digital literacy at that RPTRA (Prasetya et al., 2023). Likewise, a mural program at RPTRA Krendang, West Jakarta, showed how visual art (murals) can serve as a medium for education and community empowerment, involving local participants from youth to adults and transforming wall areas into creative murals. This is a concrete example of how visual art can contribute to improving the quality of the learning environment in RPTRAs.

Based on this situational analysis, a community service program is needed to address the partner's problems by strengthening the creativity and visual literacy of school-age children, utilizing RPTRA Kebon Sirih as an art-based learning space (Rohamah et al., 2021). Visual literacy has been shown to improve learning outcomes and critical thinking, as well as reading intelligence (Alma Indah & Fadilah, 2024; Lathifah, 2020) . This program is expected to provide a solution to the limited availability of creative educational activities while optimizing the potential of the RPTRA as a child-friendly public space.

METHOD

The method of this community service program was designed to be participatory and systematic in order to address the problems of the target partner, namely the children participating in educational activities at RPTRA Kebon Sirih, Jakarta. The program employed Participatory Action Research (PAR) combined with an experiential learning approach (Kolb, 2015). PAR was applied to ensure the active involvement of children, RPTRA managers, and facilitators throughout all stages of the program, from needs identification, program planning, and implementation of creative workshops to joint evaluation and reflection (Rahmat & Mirnawati, 2020).

Through this approach, children were positioned not merely as recipients of material but as active subjects in the process of learning art and visual literacy. They were directly involved in visual exploration, artwork creation, discussion, and reflection on the works they produced. Meanwhile, the experiential learning approach was implemented through hands-on learning activities (*learning by doing*) (Surahman & Fauziati, 2021), through which children gained an understanding of visual concepts, creative skills, and appreciation values through contextual and enjoyable art practice in the RPTRA environment.

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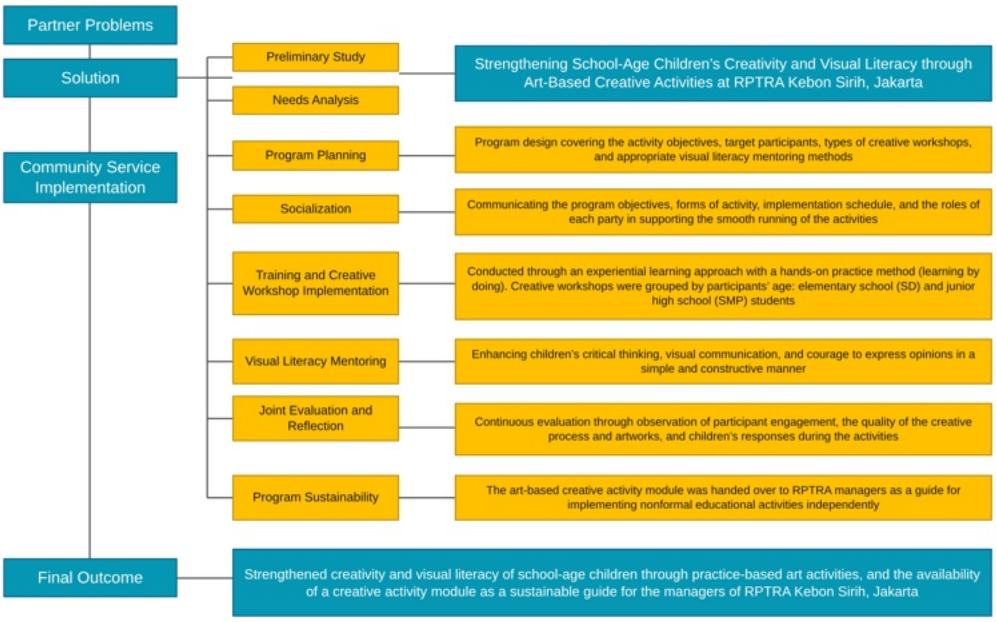


Figure 3. Stages of Program Implementation (Source: Authors, adapted from the program design)

The implementation of the community service program used Participatory Action Research (PAR) combined with experiential learning to ensure that the activities were participatory, aligned with the partner's needs, and sustainable. The stages were as follows:

1. Needs identification and partner situation analysis: The team conducted observations and discussions with the RPTRA managers to identify conditions, needs, and problems related to developing children's creativity and visual literacy.
2. Program planning: The team designed the program, materials, module, and creative workshops tailored to the participants' characteristics and the conditions of the RPTRA.
3. Program socialization to the partner and participants: Socialization was conducted with the RPTRA managers and participants to communicate the objectives, schedule, and implementation mechanism of the activities.
4. Training and creative workshop implementation: The activities were conducted using the *learning by doing* method. Elementary school participants took part in bookmark-making and mask-painting workshops, while junior high school participants attended training in making macramé phone straps and pipe-cleaner flowers.
5. Visual literacy mentoring: Participants were guided to recognize visual elements, communicate the ideas and meanings of their works, and appreciate their peers' works in order to strengthen visual literacy and creativity.
6. Joint evaluation and reflection: Evaluation was carried out through observation of participant engagement, assessment of artworks, and joint reflection with the partner as the basis for program improvement.

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7. Program sustainability: The team handed over an art-based creative activity module to the RPTRA managers as a guide for implementing educational activities that can be continued independently and sustainably.

The success of the program was measured using descriptive quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative measurement was conducted using an observation sheet (checklist) of participant engagement and the achievement of indicators in each workshop. The observed indicators included participants' ability to produce artworks, recognize visual elements (color, shape, and line), communicate the ideas or meanings of their works, and appreciate their peers' works. The achievement percentage was calculated by comparing the number of participants who met each indicator with the total number of participants. Qualitative measurement was carried out through direct observation, documentation of artworks, and brief interviews with participants and RPTRA managers after the activities. The qualitative data were used to describe behavioral changes, such as increased self-confidence, enthusiasm for creating art, ability to cooperate, and courage to express opinions during the learning process.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Description of Activities

The community service program entitled "Strengthening School-Age Children's Creativity Through Visual Literacy in Art-Based Creative Activities at RPTRA Kebon Sirih, Jakarta" was implemented to improve the creativity, visual literacy, and expressive abilities of school-age children through an art-based learning approach. The program was designed based on the needs of the partner, RPTRA Kebon Sirih, which still faced limitations in organizing structured and sustainable educational activities for children.

The program began with a needs identification process through field observations and discussions with the RPTRA managers. The results indicated that the children needed activities that were not only recreational but also capable of developing creative thinking, visual literacy, and art-making skills. Based on these findings, the community service team designed a series of creative workshops adapted to the participants' characteristics according to their age groups.

The program comprised four main activities designed to develop craft skills and an understanding of basic visual elements through a practice-based learning approach (*learning by doing*). The workshops for elementary school (SD) participants consisted of bookmark making and mask painting, which aimed to introduce basic visual elements such as color, shape, and composition through enjoyable activities. Meanwhile, junior high school (SMP) participants attended workshops on making macramé phone straps and pipe-cleaner flowers as a means of developing craft skills, creativity, and precision. All activities applied the *learning by doing* method, enabling participants to gain direct learning experiences through the process of making art.

At the elementary level, the two activities focused on introducing basic visual elements through bookmark making and mask painting, aiming to improve

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participants' understanding of primary and secondary colors, basic shapes, and simple composition principles through direct art-making (Hryhorenko & Shevchenko, 2020; Wright, 2001). The bookmark activity emphasized the integration of color and shape as well as the development of fine motor skills, while mask painting allowed elementary students to explore visual expression through decorative patterns to create richer visual imagery. Both activities were delivered through the *learning by doing* method, consisting of brief demonstrations, independent work, and small-group sharing sessions, in line with theories emphasizing the benefits of practice-based art learning for strengthening visual elements and creativity (Wright, 2001) .



Figure 4. Mask Painting and Bookmark-Making Activities (Source: Authors' documentation)

Junior high school participants took part in two craft activities aimed at developing craft skills, creativity, and precision. The macramé phone strap activity focused on knot patterns, rhythm, and symmetry to train precision and the ability to plan designs step by step (Ingin et al., 2019; Kärnä-Behm & Harjuniemi, 2023). The pipe-cleaner flower activity challenged participants to engineer flower forms precisely using nontraditional materials, thereby enhancing perseverance, material manipulation skills, and design innovation. Both activities also applied the *learning by doing* approach, supported by technical facilitators, final design evaluation, and an exhibition of the works, consistent with the literature on craft course design and project-based learning in nonformal education contexts. Overall, the four activities were designed to encourage active participation, teamwork, and reflection on the creative process, consistent with a literature framework that emphasizes process, exploration, and expression in art learning (Wright, 2001).

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Figure 5. Making Macramé Phone Straps and Pipe-Cleaner Flowers (Source: Authors' documentation)

In addition to the practical activities, participants received visual literacy mentoring through artwork appreciation and reflection sessions. At this stage, the children were encouraged to identify the visual elements in their works, explain the ideas underlying their creative process, and appreciate their peers' works. This approach helped participants develop critical thinking, visual communication skills, and the confidence to convey their ideas creatively.

The program provided added value to the community, particularly in educational and social aspects. In the short term, the activities improved children's knowledge and skills in visual literacy, fostered creativity, and built the courage to express themselves through art. The children also demonstrated a high level of participation throughout each workshop session and were able to produce works that met the predetermined learning objectives.

For the partner, the program produced an art-based creative activity module that can be used as a guide for organizing educational activities independently. The module supports program sustainability by providing the RPTRA managers with a reference for developing regular creative activities for children. In the long term, the program is expected to strengthen the function of the RPTRA as a public space that serves not only as a playground but also as a nonformal learning center that supports the development of children's creativity, visual literacy, and character. Furthermore, the collaboration among Universitas Negeri Jakarta, the RPTRA management, and the community is expected to become a sustainable partnership model for implementing art-based community empowerment programs.

Level of Understanding of the Activities

The success of the community service program was measured by the achievement of its stated objective, namely improving the creativity and visual literacy of school-age children through art-based creative activities at RPTRA Kebon Sirih, Jakarta. Achievement indicators were measured using observation sheets, documentation of artworks, and process evaluation during the activities. The success criteria included the level of participant engagement, the ability to produce works in accordance with the workshop materials, the ability to recognize basic visual elements, the ability to communicate ideas through artworks, and increased self-confidence and active participation in each session. In addition, the program's

success was also demonstrated by the development of an art-based creative activity module that RPTRA managers can use as a guide for implementing activities sustainably.

The learning methodology emphasized portfolio-based formative evaluation of artworks, reflection notes, and group discussions to assess participants' understanding of visual elements and the quality of their craft products. Documentation was carried out systematically through photographs, process descriptions, and finished works exhibited at the end of the workshops, so that the works became a source for evaluating learning and improving subsequent programs. The challenges identified included logistical and material constraints, varying levels of participant proficiency, and the need for the involvement of parents and accompanying teachers to reinforce continued learning in the school environment. The solutions implemented included the use of simple, safe, and affordable materials, the adjustment of technical steps according to age, and the active role of accompanying teacher..

The main strength of this program lies in its experiential learning approach through the *learning by doing* method, which enables participants to learn directly through art-making practice. This approach made the activities more engaging, easier to understand, and appropriate to the characteristics of school-age children. In addition, the module produced as an output adds value because it can be used independently by RPTRA managers, giving the program potential for sustainability. However, the program's weaknesses relate to the limited implementation time, which prevented intensive long-term mentoring of participants. Differences in participants' ages and abilities also required adjustments to the mentoring methods so that all participants could follow the activities optimally. Moreover, program sustainability still depends on the commitment of the RPTRA managers to implement the module that has been developed.

Looking ahead, the program has considerable potential for further development. The art-based creative workshop model can be replicated in other RPTRAs as well as in schools and children's communities by adjusting it to participants' characteristics and local potential. The module can also be developed into digital teaching materials or training media for RPTRA managers, thereby supporting program sustainability and broadening the impact of community service.

CONCLUSION

The community service program entitled "Strengthening School-Age Children's Creativity Through Visual Literacy in Art-Based Creative Activities at RPTRA Kebon Sirih, Jakarta" was implemented in accordance with its planned objectives and had a positive impact on both participants and the partner. Through Participatory Action Research (PAR) and experiential learning, the children gained interactive learning experiences through various art-based creative activities. The workshops not only improved their art-making skills but also strengthened their ability to understand visual elements, express ideas creatively, and develop self-confidence and communication skills.

The success of the program was demonstrated by the high level of participation, participants' ability to produce works in accordance with the materials provided, and the children's increased enthusiasm in every stage of the activities. Beyond benefiting the participants, the program also produced an art-based creative activity module that RPTRA managers can use as a guideline for organizing educational activities independently and sustainably. Overall, the program successfully brought about positive changes in participants' knowledge, skills, and attitudes. It has the potential to be replicated in other RPTRAs or communities with similar characteristics through sustained collaboration among higher education institutions, the government, and the community. Thus, the program not only provides short-term benefits for participants but also supports the creation of a sustainable creative learning ecosystem for school-age children.

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