

Development of a Collaborative Community Service Program Based on Literacy, Writing Therapy, and SRQ Screening as a Preventive Strategy for Students Mental Health

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Abstract

This research aims to strengthen literacy education through mental health screening using the Self-Reporting Questionnaire (SRQ) and the application of writing therapy as a means of expressive literacy. Thirty-two students participated in this activity. The SRQ screening results indicated that most students fell into the low category for indications of psychological disorders, while others fell into the moderate and high categories. These findings formed the basis for implementing writing therapy, which aimed to improve writing skills and help participants express their thoughts and feelings in writing. The evaluation of the activity showed a very positive response, with the majority of participants stating that they understood the material, were able to participate effectively in the activities, and felt a positive impact on themselves. Therefore, this research activity can be concluded as an effective effort to strengthen literacy education integrated with a psychosocial support approach for students.

Keywords: literacy education, writing therapy, SRQ screening, mental health, community service.

1. INTRODUCTION

Literacy education is a crucial foundation for developing quality human resources. Literacy is not only defined as the ability to read and write mechanically, but also encompasses critical, reflective, and expressive thinking (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017). In the context of modern education, literacy serves as a means of personality development, character building, and emotional regulation for students.

Adolescent development theory explains that the middle school age period is a period vulnerable to psychosocial pressures, such as academic demands, social relationships, and the search for identity (Santrock, 2018). If not managed properly, these conditions can trigger stress, anxiety, and emotional disorders. Therefore, an educational

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approach is needed that focuses not only on academic achievement but also on students' mental health.

One relevant approach is the integration of literacy education with preventive mental health interventions. The Self-Reporting Questionnaire (SRQ), developed by the World Health Organization (WHO), is an effective non-clinical screening instrument for detecting early indications of psychological disorders. The use of the SRQ in educational contexts serves as a preventive and educational measure to increase students' awareness of their emotional state.

Furthermore, writing therapy (expressive writing) is seen as an expressive literacy strategy capable of bridging cognitive and emotional aspects. According to Pennebaker and Chung (2011), writing about emotional experiences can help individuals process emotions, improve self-understanding, and strengthen psychological well-being (Pennebaker & Chung, 2011; Baikie & Wilhelm, 2005). Therefore, combining writing therapy and SRQ screening developed by the World Health Organization (WHO, 1994) in community service activities is an innovative approach to strengthening literacy while preventing mental health problems in students.

Literacy education is not only concerned with technical reading and writing skills, but also includes the ability to express thoughts, feelings, and experiences (Street, 2003; Gee, 2015; UNESCO, 2006). In practice, many students still experience difficulties in channeling emotions and ideas, which is often related to their psychological state.

Students' mental health is a crucial concern in education. Early detection of emotional problems is necessary so that students receive appropriate support. Therefore, integrating mental health screening using the Self-Reporting Questionnaire (SRQ) with literacy activities is a relevant and contextual approach.

Writing therapy was chosen as an expressive literacy strategy that not only improves writing skills but also helps students engage in self-reflection and emotional regulation. Through this approach, community service activities are expected to provide a preventive contribution to students' mental health.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Literacy Education from a Holistic Perspective

Holistic literacy education positions literacy as a learning process encompassing cognitive, affective, and social aspects. According to UNESCO (2016), literacy is a basic human right that contributes to individual well-being and sustainable development. In the school context, literacy serves as a means of developing students' critical and reflective thinking skills, as well as self-expression.

2.2 Character Education and Student Mental Health

Character education aims to shape individuals with noble character, responsibility, and mental resilience. Ki Hadjar Dewantara emphasized the importance of education that fosters good character through the synergy of family, school, and community. Values such as empathy, self-control, and responsibility play a vital role in maintaining students' mental health.

2.3 Writing Therapy (Expressive Writing)

Writing therapy is a psychological method that utilizes writing to express emotional experiences. Pennebaker (1997) states that expressive writing can help individuals organize thoughts, reduce stress, and improve psychological well-being. In an educational context, writing therapy serves as a safe and constructive medium for reflective literacy.

2.4 Self-Reporting Questionnaire (SRQ) as an Early Detection Tool

The Self-Reporting Questionnaire (SRQ) was developed by the WHO as a screening instrument to identify early indications of psychological disorders such as depression and anxiety. The SRQ is widely used in community and educational contexts because it is simple, non-diagnostic, and easy to apply.

2.5 Integration of Literacy, Writing Therapy, and SRQ Screening

The integration of reflective literacy with writing therapy and SRQ screening is an innovative preventive approach. This approach allows students to improve their literacy skills while recognizing and reflecting on their emotional states. Previous research has shown that this integrated approach is effective in increasing self-awareness, emotional regulation, and active student participation.

2.6 Literacy and Character Education

Literacy education is an integral part of students' character and character development. Reflective literacy allows students to express their values, emotions, and life experiences in writing as part of a meaningful learning process.

2.7 Writing Therapy as Expressive Literacy

Writing therapy, or expressive writing, is a method that allows individuals to express their emotional experiences in written form. This approach has been shown to provide psychological benefits, including stress reduction and increased self-awareness.

2.8 SRQ Screening in Early Detection of Mental Health

The Self-Reporting Questionnaire (SRQ) is a screening instrument developed by the WHO to detect early indications of psychological disorders. The use of the SRQ in educational contexts serves as a tool for early mapping of students' emotional states.

3. METHODS

3.1 Research Approach and Type

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design (Creswell, 2014; Yin, 2018). The aim is to describe in depth the development and implementation process of the Literacy-Based Collaborative Student Creativity Program, Writing Therapy, and SRQ Screening as a preventive strategy for student mental health.

The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore phenomena naturally based on the experiences and perspectives of participants, without any manipulation of variables. This approach allows the research to generate a holistic understanding of the program's effectiveness in integrating expressive literacy and psychosocial support as an effort to prevent mental health problems in adolescents.

3.2 Research Subjects and Location

The research subjects involved 32 students as the primary participants in the Student Creativity Program activities. Subject selection was conducted using purposive sampling, based on certain criteria relevant to the research objectives, including:

1. students in the adolescent age range (grades 10–12), and
2. willingness to actively participate in all activities.

This research was conducted at MTs Progresif Darunnajah, located on Jl. Soekarno-Hatta, Gg. Durian, Kelutan, Trenggalek District, Trenggalek Regency, East Java. The research took place in a classroom for approximately ****4 hours****, while adhering to health protocols and ethical research principles, such as participant consent and data confidentiality.

3.3 Data Collection Techniques

This study used three main methods for data collection:

1. Participant Observation

Direct observations were conducted during the SRQ screening process and the implementation of writing therapy to observe participant interactions, participation levels, emotional responses, and group dynamics that emerged during the activities.

2. Semi-Structured Interviews

Interviews were conducted after the activities were completed, taking the form of small group discussions. This technique aimed to explore participants' perceptions, subjective experiences, and assessments of the program's impact on their emotional well-being, expressive literacy, and mental health.

3. Documentation

Documentation includes the SRQ screening results sheet, participants' written work during writing therapy, and activity response evaluation sheets. Documentation data is used to support and strengthen the results of observations and interviews.

3.4 Research Instruments

The research instrument consists of four main components that are integrated to collect qualitative and quantitative data from 32 student participants, namely:

1. Mental Health Screening Sheet (SRQ-20)

This instrument uses the WHO-standard Self-Reporting Questionnaire (SRQ-20), which consists of 20 questions with yes or no answer options. Each yes answer is given a score of 1. The screening results are categorized as follows:

- a. Low score (0–5): 14 students
- b. Medium score (6–10): 9 students
- c. High score (≥ 11): 9 students

This instrument is used to identify early indications of psychological disorders in participants.

2. Participant Observation Sheet

The observation sheet was used to record indicators such as active participation, emotional expression while writing, writing quality, and group interactions during the four-hour activity. Assessments were conducted using a 1–5 scale and supplemented with qualitative field notes.

3. Writing Therapy Activity Evaluation Questionnaire

The evaluation questionnaire used a 1–5 Likert scale (1–3: Strongly Disagree–Undecided; 4–5: Agree–Strongly Agree) with three main statements:

- a. Understanding of the material (32 students agreed, 100% responded positively)
- b. Ability to participate in the activity (30 students agreed, 94% responded positively; 2 students were undecided)
- c. Positive impact on participants (31 students agreed, 97% responded positively; 1 student was undecided)

These results indicate a very positive response from participants to the writing therapy activity.

4. Semi-Structured Interview Guide

The interview guide consists of five open-ended questions, including:

- a. How did you feel after completing the SRQ?
- b. How did writing therapy help you express your emotions?
- c. What changes in your literacy skills did you experience?
- d. What was the biggest impact of this activity on your mental health?
- e. What are your suggestions for future program improvements?

4. RESULTS

The results presented include SRQ screening data, student responses to writing therapy, and the impact of the activity on strengthening students' literacy and emotional awareness.

4.1 Implementation of Writing Therapy

The results of the Community Service activity demonstrated that reflective literacy education based on writing therapy combined with Self-Reporting Questionnaire (SRQ) screening was implemented effectively and positively received by students. The activity, attended by 32 students, encouraged active participation, self-reflection, and strengthened literacy skills and emotional awareness.

All 32 students reported understanding the reflective literacy and writing therapy materials presented. Thirty students demonstrated a good understanding of the flow and objectives of the activity, while two students had a relatively poor understanding. These findings indicate that, despite the one-day activity, the material was widely understood by the participants.

The analysis of student writing revealed a diversity of topics reflecting personal experiences, such as the dynamics of school life, peer relationships, learning difficulties, and various emotions, including anxiety, sadness, anger, disappointment, and happiness. Some students not only wrote about their experiences and feelings but also included

concrete efforts to address challenges, such as managing study time, seeking social support, and engaging in activities that helped relieve stress.

Student responses to writing therapy tended to be very positive. Thirty-one of the 32 students reported experiencing direct benefits from this activity, particularly in helping them express their emotions and understand their own condition. Only one student stated that the activity had not yet significantly impacted them.

The SRQ screening results showed a variety of students' emotional states. Fourteen students were in the low category of psychological distress, nine in the moderate category, and nine in the high category. Students with higher SRQ scores tended to write about deeper and more complex emotional experiences, while students with lower scores produced shorter and more descriptive writing. These findings indicate that the SRQ is able to provide an initial overview of students' emotional states and aligns with the emotional expressions that emerge in their reflective writing.

5. DISCUSSION

The results of this community service activity demonstrate that writing therapy, integrated into reflective literacy education, can be an effective medium for helping students express their experiences and emotions. These findings reinforce the view that literacy serves not only as an academic skill but also as a means of self-reflection and strengthening emotional well-being.

The high level of student understanding of the material and the positive response to the activities demonstrate that the reflective literacy approach can be practically implemented, even in a relatively short period of time. Writing about personal experiences provides a safe space for students to express feelings that may be difficult to express verbally, thus supporting emotional regulation and self-awareness.

These findings are consistent with the theory of expressive writing proposed by James W. Pennebaker, who states that writing about emotional experiences can help individuals process emotions and improve psychological well-being (Pennebaker, 1997; Pennebaker & Chung, 2011). This is also supported by Karen A. Baikie and Wilhelm (2005), who found that expressive writing contributes to stress reduction and emotional health improvement. In this study, students who actively engaged in writing therapy were able to express deeper emotions and reported positive psychological impacts, confirming these theoretical perspectives.

The integration of the SRQ into literacy activities enriches students' reflection processes. Screening results revealed significant variation in emotional states among students, indicating that some students may be in a condition requiring further attention. The concordance between SRQ scores and the depth of emotional expression in their writing suggests that the combination of screening and writing therapy can complement each other in understanding students' psychological states at an early, non-clinical level.

This finding is in line with the function of the Self-Reporting Questionnaire developed by the World Health Organization as an early detection tool for psychological disorders (WHO, 1994). The ability of the SRQ to identify variations in students' emotional conditions confirms its effectiveness as a preventive and educational instrument in non-clinical settings, particularly in schools.

From a literacy perspective, the results of this study are also aligned with the concept of literacy as a social and expressive practice proposed by Brian Street (2003) and James Paul Gee (2015), which emphasize that literacy is not merely the ability to read and write technically, but also includes the ability to express thoughts, emotions, and personal experiences. The students' ability to articulate their feelings and life experiences in writing demonstrates the implementation of this broader concept of literacy. This is further strengthened by the perspective of UNESCO (2006, 2016), which highlights literacy as a means of developing critical thinking, self-expression, and individual well-being.

Students' active participation in writing and sharing their work also contributes to strengthening positive social interactions. This activity encourages mutual respect, empathy, and openness among students, which are important aspects of social-emotional learning. This finding supports the adolescent development theory proposed by John W. Santrock (2018), which states that adolescence is a vulnerable phase characterized by emotional fluctuations and identity exploration. The themes that emerged in students' writing, such as anxiety, peer relationships, and self-reflection, reflect these developmental characteristics.

However, the limited time of one day hindered the in-depth reflection process, especially for students who still felt awkward expressing their emotions in writing. This suggests that writing therapy will have a more optimal impact if implemented continuously with consistent guidance. Therefore, future programs are recommended to be conducted in a more sustainable and structured manner to maximize both literacy development and students' mental health support.

6. CONCLUSION

Based on the results and discussion, it can be concluded that the activity through reflective literacy education based on writing therapy had a positive impact on students' literacy skills and emotional well-being. All students were able to understand the material presented, and most demonstrated active engagement in reflective writing, sharing experiences, and completing the Self-Reporting Questionnaire (SRQ).

Writing therapy proved effective as a means of self-reflection and emotional expression. The majority of students experienced immediate benefits in understanding their feelings, increasing self-awareness, and planning simple steps to address personal challenges. Analysis of their writing demonstrated strengthening of both literacy and emotional regulation skills.

The SRQ screening results revealed variations in students' emotional states, highlighting the importance of early detection as a preventative measure for mental health. The integration of the SRQ with writing therapy helped students recognize their emotional states and deepen their self-reflection process, although it was not intended to lead to a clinical diagnosis.

Despite time constraints and the perceived discomfort of a small number of students expressing their emotions, overall, this activity was well-received and had a significant impact. Thus, literacy education through writing therapy combined with SRQ screening can be used as an effective alternative approach in supporting the development of literacy, self-awareness, and emotional well-being of students.

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