

## Strengthening and Mentoring of Out-of-School Children through Universitas Terbuka Participation to Realize Access to Sustainable Education

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### ABSTRAK

Program pengabdian masyarakat yang diinisiasi oleh Universitas Terbuka berfokus pada penguatan dan pendampingan anak-anak putus sekolah di Kota Serang, Provinsi Banten. Masalah utama yang dihadapi adalah meningkatnya jumlah putus sekolah, terutama di tingkat SD dan SMP, karena kemiskinan, perundungan, dan kurangnya dukungan keluarga dan sekolah. Tujuan dari program ini adalah untuk meningkatkan kesadaran masyarakat akan pentingnya pendidikan dan mendorong anak-anak untuk kembali ke sekolah. Metode yang digunakan meliputi studi literatur, penilaian kebutuhan, dan pendekatan partisipatif melalui konseling dan pelatihan untuk orang tua dan anak. Evaluasi dilakukan melalui wawancara untuk menilai perubahan sikap masyarakat. Hasil pengabdian menunjukkan peningkatan pemahaman masyarakat akan pentingnya pendidikan dan sinergi antara pemerintah, sekolah, dan masyarakat dalam menciptakan lingkungan belajar yang inklusif. Program ini diharapkan dapat memperkuat akses pendidikan bagi anak-anak putus sekolah dan mengurangi angka putus sekolah.

**Kata kunci :** *Anak Tidak Bersekolah, Akses Pendidikan, Pendampingan Masyarakat*

### ABSTRACT

The community service program initiated by Universitas Terbuka focuses on strengthening and mentoring out-of-school children in Serang City, Banten Province. The main issue faced is the increasing number of school dropouts, especially at the elementary and junior high school levels, due to poverty, bullying, and lack of family and school support. The goal of this program is to increase public awareness of the importance of education and encourage children to return to school. The methods used include literature studies, needs assessments, and participatory approaches through counseling and training for parents and children. Evaluations are carried out through interviews to assess changes in community attitudes. The results of the service show an increase in community understanding of the importance of education and synergy between the government, schools, and the community in creating an inclusive learning environment. This program is expected to strengthen access to education for out-of-school children and reduce dropout rates.

**Keywords:** *Children Not in School, Access to Education, Community Assistance*

## INTRODUCTION

The policy of the Ministry of Education and Culture (Kemendikbud) for the 2020–2024 period focuses on increasing participation in education at various levels. The main targets of this policy include increasing participation in early childhood education, the success of the nine- and twelve-year compulsory education programs, and increasing participation in higher education (Kemendikbud, 2020). However, several provinces still face challenges in achieving this target, one of which is Banten Province. Data from the Central Statistics Agency in 2023 shows that the school sustainability rate for the 13–15 year old age group in Banten is lower than the national average of 97.83 percent. In comparison, West Java recorded 99.09 percent, while Papua only reached 80.09 percent. This indicates that Banten Province requires more attention in increasing school participation.

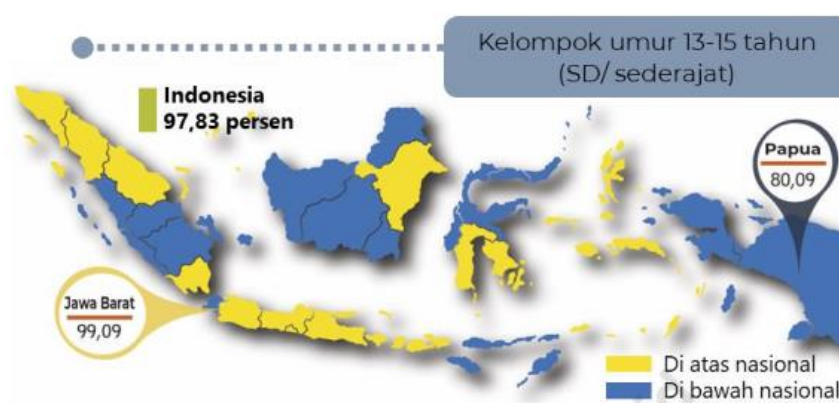
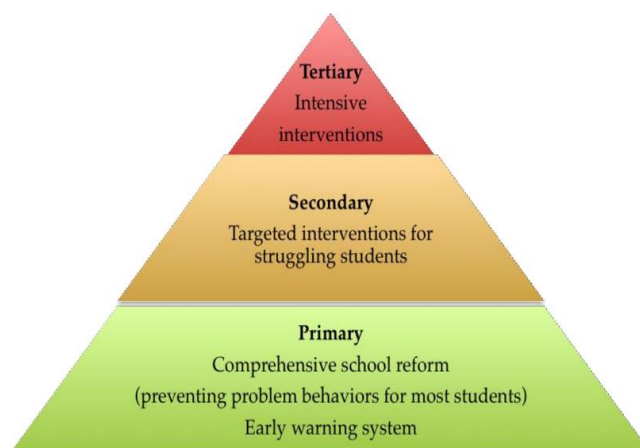


Figure 1. Distribution of school continuation rates in Indonesia (BPS, 2023)

The phenomenon of dropping out of school in Serang City, Banten Province, is increasingly worrying. Based on data from the Serang City Education and Culture Office (Dindikbud) in 2024, there were 1,752 children who dropped out of school at the Elementary School (SD) and Junior High School (SMP) levels, a sharp increase from only 122 children in the previous year (Bantenintens, 2024). The highest number was found in Serang District (476 children) and Kasemen (389 children), with the largest number occurring at the junior high school level. The main causes of this phenomenon include poverty, bullying, and lack of family and school support. This is in line with the findings (Chirtes, 2010), of, who stated that factors such as financial constraints, academic inability, and psychological pressure influence children's decisions to drop out of school. Poverty is a dominant factor in school dropout cases

in Serang City. Findings by Okumu show that children from underprivileged families are more vulnerable to dropping out of school, especially in areas with limited access to education (Okumu, et.al, 2008). In addition, an uncondusive school environment also contributes to this phenomenon. Bullying and psychological violence, both in the school environment and at home, worsen the conditions of children who are vulnerable to dropping out of school. Research Bello Mustapha, Sammy K. Chumba Poverty is a predominant factor leading to school dropouts, as families often prioritize immediate economic survival over education. Children from poor families are more likely to drop out due to the need to contribute to household income through child labor (Bello, et.al, 2024). Research Njagi dan Mwanja revealed that poor parenting patterns and minimal parental attention have an impact on children's decisions to drop out of school (Njogu, et. al,2017). Similar findings were reported by Afia et al., who showed that parental neglect and lack of supervision increased the risk of dropping out of school (Afia, et.al, 2019). Ricard and Pelletier stated that parental support is the most significant predictive factor in determining whether a child will continue their education(Nathalie & Pelletir, 2016). The high dropout rate has a negative impact on the quality of education in Indonesia. The more children who do not continue their education, the lower the overall quality of education at the national level. This is a significant challenge in achieving the target of inclusive and equitable education across the region. The main impact is the reduced opportunities for children from underprivileged families to get adequate education, which ultimately limits their social and economic mobility. Family, school, and community involvement is critical to ensuring children stay on track in education. Programs that actively involve parents in their children's education have been shown to be effective in reducing dropout rates. One relevant prevention model is the Three-Tiered Dropout Prevention Model Mac Iver & Mac Iver, as illustrated in Figure 2, which offers three levels of intervention: (1) building strong school systems and positive learning environments, (2) providing early intervention for students at risk of dropping out, and (3) providing intensive support to students who already show signs of vulnerability to dropping out ( Abele, 2009).



**Figure 2. Three-tier dropout prevention model for districts and schools (Mac Iver and Mac Iver, 2009)**

Supportive community environments play a vital role in reducing dropout rates. Safe and secure communities help foster positive engagement in a child's education. Itzhak et al.'s research shows that community support can reduce the risk of children dropping out of school (Ithzaki, et.al, 2018). Similar findings were presented by Yee Wan and Tsui, who stated that safe communities can maintain children's mental health, thereby reducing the risk of dropping out of school (Yee Wan & Tsui, 2020). Based on this, Universitas Terbuka implemented a community service program aimed at raising awareness of the importance of education, strengthening local institutions, and providing assistance to children who drop out of school. This program is relevant to addressing the problem of dropping out of school in Serang City with a comprehensive approach involving various parties. This article is presented as an implementation report that outlines systematic steps, and discusses the findings and their implications for related parties.

## METHOD

The community service program implemented in Serang City covers several sub-districts, namely Cipocok Jaya, Serang, Kasemen, Walantaka, Taktakan, and Curug. As the center of government of Banten Province, Serang City has complex social dynamics, including education issues. This program is specifically aimed at helping children who have dropped out of school in the area to continue their formal education. This program involves 15 parents of children who are not in school from six sub-districts, as well as four resource persons. The implementation of this community service program consists of three stages: (1) preparation stage, (2) implementation stage, and (3) evaluation stage. In the preparation stage, a literature

study was conducted to collect training materials and data from various references, including books, scientific journals, and other relevant sources. In addition, a search for sources from the internet was also conducted to obtain the latest information on school dropout rates, their causes, and strategies to overcome them. The team also made direct visits to several sub-districts, such as Cipocok Jaya, Serang, Kasemen, Walantaka, Taktakan, and Curug in Serang City, Banten Province, to conduct a needs assessment.

**Table 1. Stages of implementation of Community Service**

Preparation stage	Implementation stage	Evaluation stage
a. Literature study	a. Offline training 1 meeting	a. Process assessment
b. Direct visit	b. Family empowerment	b. Outcome assessment

In the implementation stage, this activity fully adopts an experimental and participatory strategy that integrates counseling with empowerment. The community outreach method is applied to raise awareness of the importance of education, both for children and their families. This outreach was held on May 11, 2024 at the Muhammadiyah High School Hall in Serang City. In this activity, the community service team invited parents and the local community to understand the long-term impact of education on their children. Education is delivered through a participatory approach, where the community is invited to share their experiences and understanding of the educational challenges they face. This approach not only creates awareness but also builds a sense of shared responsibility in supporting children to continue their education.

After the counseling was completed, the evaluation stage was carried out through interviews to explore testimonies regarding the benefits of the activities from counseling participants, including parents and local community members. Interviews were conducted in depth with the aim of gaining a clearer understanding of changes in participants' understanding and attitudes towards the importance of education. Through these interviews, the community service team attempted to assess the extent to which the counseling material had influenced the views and actions of the community, especially related to efforts to encourage their children to return to school or continue their education.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

## Result

The implementation of the activity began with the collection of relevant data and materials through literature studies from various sources, including books, scientific journals, and previous research. The team also utilized sources from the internet to gain a deeper understanding of the dropout rate in the target area, the main causes of the phenomenon, and prevention strategies that have been successfully implemented in other areas.

In addition to conducting literature studies, the team also conducted needs assessments in several sub-districts in Serang City, Banten Province, namely Cipocok Jaya, Serang, Kasemen, Walantaka, Taktakan, and Curug. The field visit aimed to identify specific conditions in each sub-district, including social, economic, and cultural factors that influence school dropout rates. The results of this assessment serve as the basis for planning targeted interventions. After thorough planning based on the results of the needs assessment, implementation was carried out through counseling, training, and mentoring. The goal is to provide education on the importance of education, increase awareness of parents and the community about the long-term impacts of dropping out of school, and strengthen local institutions involved in addressing this issue. This program involved 15 parents of children who were not attending school, from six sub-districts, and four resource persons. The counseling materials presented included: 1) The Importance of Education and Its Impact on Children's Future; 2) Effective Strategies for Assisting Children Who Are Not in School; 3) Collaboration between Families, Educational Institutions, and the Government; and 4) Family Economic Empowerment to Support Children's Education.



Figure 3. Opening of Extension Activities



## **Discussion**

### **The Importance of Education and Its Impact on Children's Future**

This material aims to raise awareness of families of unschooled children about the long-term benefits of education for children's development, both in terms of skills, job opportunities, and improving quality of life. With this discussion, it is hoped that participants can better understand why education is a basic right and need that should not be ignored. After this material session, one of the participants with the initials WN was invited to conduct an open interview.

Interviewer: "After attending the counseling earlier, what do you think about the importance of education for your child's future?"

Mrs. WN: "Yes, I understand better now. Previously, I thought, if my child works faster, he can help the family, he can earn money. But it turns out, I just realized that school is very important for the child's future. If they go to school, they say they can have better skills, so they don't just do manual labor. They can find better jobs, which also have better salaries, so they can live better in the future."

Interviewer: "Did the material presented earlier change your views about children's education?"

Mrs. WN: "Yes, honestly, I didn't think too much about it before. What was important to me before was that my children could help at home or work to help their father. But now I think again, if they go to college, maybe they won't have as much trouble as we do now. They will have a brighter future, not always living from day to day. So now I am more enthusiastic about encouraging my children to go back to school, so that their future will be better."

### **Effective Strategies for Assisting Children Who Are Not in School**

This material offers insights and techniques to parents and caregivers in encouraging children who are out of school to be motivated to go back to school. The discussion includes how to provide emotional support, build effective communication with children, and create a home environment that supports the learning process. After this material session, one of the participants with the initials M was invited to do an open interview. Interviewer: "After attending the counseling earlier, what are your views on how to accompany children so that they want to go back to school?"

Mrs. M: "I got a lot from it earlier. It turns out that it is very important for us, parents, to give support to our children. I used to think, if they don't want to go to school, well, just let them. But it turns out that was wrong. Children need support, encouragement. You also have to be patient in talking to them slowly, so that they want to go back to school. The important thing is not to keep scolding them."

Interviewer: "After hearing the material earlier, is there a way that you want to apply at home?"

Mrs. M: "Yes, earlier we were told that we should talk more to our children, don't just nag or order them around. I want to try to talk more with my child, ask him why he doesn't want to go to school. Maybe there's a problem that he's not telling me about. Also, make the house more comfortable for him to study, don't force him to be smart straight away, but do it slowly. What's important is that he knows that we support him."

### **Family Collaboration with Educational Institutions and Government**

In this session, training participants will be given information about the importance of collaborating with schools, communities, and governments to help children return to school. This material includes ways to utilize available educational programs, access educational assistance, and actively participate in community activities that support education. After this material session, one of the participants with the initials A was invited to do an open interview. Interviewer: "What do you think is most useful from this material?"

Mrs. A: "The most useful thing for me was the explanation about assistance programs and how we can work together with schools. So we know where to go if there is a problem. I never dared to go to school, but now I understand that they can also help if we work together."

Interviewer: "Do you intend to work together with schools or take advantage of government programs after this?"

Mrs. A: "Yes, now I want to be more active. It was also said earlier, if we don't ask or don't come to school, we don't know what they can help us with. I also just found out that there are scholarships and assistance programs from the government. I want to try to take care of that for my child, so he can go back to school without thinking about the cost."



### **Family Economic Empowerment to Support Children's Education**

Economic limitations are often the main reason children drop out of school. Therefore, this material discusses strategies for family economic empowerment, such as skills training for parents, family financial management, and information on access to social assistance that can help ease the economic burden related to education. After this material session, one of the participants with the initials IS was invited to do an open interview.

Interviewer: "Are there any strategies from the material that you would like to apply at home?"

Mrs. IS: "Yes, I am very interested in the skills training mentioned earlier. If I can join, maybe I can have additional income. Then about how to manage finances, I also want to try, so that it is more organized. Because so far, sometimes my salary is just used up for daily needs, nothing is set aside for my children's education."

Interviewer: "After this, what are your plans to support your children's education?"

Mrs. IS: "I want to try to find the training explained earlier, so that I can increase my income. Then I also want to be smarter in managing money, so that not all of it is spent on unimportant needs. I also want to find out more about social assistance that I can get, so that my children can go back to school and not be too burdened by the costs."

The community service program run by Universitas Terbuka has significant implications for the government, especially in efforts to reduce the dropout rate in Serang City. This program shows that active collaboration between higher education institutions, local governments, and the community can effectively address social issues such as dropouts. Empowering families through counseling and mentoring not only increases parents' awareness of the importance of education, but also encourages them to take advantage of educational assistance programs provided by the government. Thus, this program strengthens the government's role in providing more inclusive access to education and encourages the implementation of policies that are more responsive to the educational needs of underprivileged communities.

For universities, this community service program emphasizes their role as agents of social change through community development. In this context, Universitas Terbuka not only carries out its academic function, but also acts as a catalyst that supports improving the quality

of education in areas with limited access. The involvement of students and lecturers in this program gives them the opportunity to apply their knowledge and skills in real contexts, while increasing their capacity to conduct community-based research. This program also provides universities with direct experience in establishing partnerships with local governments and institutions to address social challenges, as well as strengthening academic relevance and institutional contributions to community development.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the implementation of the community service program in Serang City, it can be concluded that the intervention carried out has succeeded in increasing public awareness, especially parents of out-of-school children (ATS), regarding the importance of education for the future of their children. This program shows that the main cause of school dropouts in the area is not only poverty, but also the lack of parental understanding of the long-term benefits of education. Through counseling and mentoring involving various parties, including parents, communities, and the government, this program has succeeded in providing more comprehensive support in overcoming the problem of school dropouts.

The program also shows that collaboration between universities, government, and communities can be an effective solution to reduce dropout rates and strengthen inclusive access to education. Universitas Terbuka, through this program, not only contributes to community capacity building, but also strengthens local institutions that are able to promote educational sustainability. The success of this program emphasizes the importance of integrated and sustainable interventions to ensure that dropout children can return to education, as well as open up opportunities for their social and economic advancement in the future.

### **Acknowledgements**

We express our deepest gratitude and thanks to all parties who have contributed and given their full support to the community service activities of Universitas Terbuka which focus on strengthening and mentoring Out-of-School Children. We would like to express our gratitude to:

1. The leadership of Universitas Terbuka who have provided support, opportunities, and facilities to organize this program well.

2. Fellow lecturers and teaching staff at schools who have sacrificed their time, energy, and knowledge to guide and mentor children in the process of mentoring out-of-school children.
3. Community partners and the Serang City Education Office who have worked together enthusiastically, helping us to reach and understand the needs of children who need special attention.
4. Parents and families out-of-school children who have entrusted us to play a role in mentoring and strengthening their beloved children.
5. All participants and volunteers who tirelessly contributed directly to the success of this activity.

We believe that this activity not only has a positive impact on children who are at risk of dropping out of school, but also becomes a real manifestation of the role of education in advancing and empowering society. We hope that this synergy can continue, and we hope to continue working together on similar programs in the future.

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## **Jurnal Pengabdian Masyarakat Mangun Karsa**

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