



Implementation of the Community Service Program in Strengthening Religious Education and Community Empowerment in Jaranguda Village, Karo Regency

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Abstract: *The Community Service Program (Kuliah Kerja Nyata/KKN) represents the implementation of the Tri Dharma of Higher Education that emphasizes student engagement with society. This activity was conducted for 14 days in Jaranguda Village, Merdeka District, Karo Regency, aiming to strengthen religious education and encourage community empowerment. The method applied was a participatory action research approach covering observation, planning, implementation, and evaluation stages carried out collaboratively with the community. The results show that religious education strengthening programs, including Qur'anic learning center assistance, youth mosque coaching, and routine religious gatherings, significantly increased the participation of children and adolescents, while community empowerment programs such as agricultural product processing training, health counseling, and communal environmental work successfully improved residents' capacity and self-reliance. The findings conclude that synergy between spiritual strengthening and socio-economic empowerment effectively improves the quality of life of rural communities.*

Introduction

The *Kuliah Kerja Nyata* (KKN), or Community Service Program, constitutes one of the implementations of the Three Pillars of Higher Education (*Tri Dharma Perguruan Tinggi*), requiring students to engage directly with the community in order to apply the knowledge they have acquired during their academic studies. Through KKN, students serve not only as agents of development but also as facilitators who help communities identify and resolve the problems they

face in a participatory manner. One of the KKN sites was Jaranguda Village, Merdeka Sub-district, Karo Regency, North Sumatra Province, a village whose majority population earns a living as horticultural farmers and has a relatively strong socio-religious life but still faces various challenges in its development.

Preliminary observations conducted prior to the program implementation revealed that religious education in Jaranguda Village, particularly at the Qur'anic Learning Center (*Taman Pendidikan Al-Qur'an*/TPA), still encountered obstacles, including a shortage of permanent teaching staff, low learning motivation among children, and limited variation in teaching methods (Suhardi, Fatimah Purba, Leli Hasanah Lubis, Irhamuddin, & Rokiba Hasibuan, 2026). Furthermore, the development of mosque youth programs had not been optimal due to the lack of mentoring and activities that attract young people. On the other hand, the community's economic potential in the form of coffee and horticultural products had not been managed optimally, while awareness of clean and healthy living behaviors and environmental cleanliness still needed improvement. These conditions provided the basis for KKN students to design a work program focusing on two main aspects: strengthening religious education and community empowerment (Samaroh Hasibuan, 2026).



Figure 1. Meeting with Village Government Officials

Thematically, such programs can contribute significantly to strengthening the religious and social values of rural communities (Hasibuan & Nasution, 2020). Consistent mentoring at the Qur'anic Learning Center (*Taman Pendidikan Al-Qur'an*/TPA) has also been shown to improve the Qur'anic reading skills of elementary school-aged children (Daulay & Siregar, 2019). Meanwhile, studies on community empowerment based on local potential indicate that training in the processing of agricultural products can enhance the economic capacity of rural residents

(Nasution & Harahap, 2022; Ginting & Barus, 2022). However, most previous studies tend to examine religious aspects and economic empowerment separately, and relatively few have integratively explored how these two dimensions can be synergized within a single, comprehensive, and sustainable community service program.

Based on the foregoing, the identified gap is the scarcity of community service programs that simultaneously integrate the strengthening of religious education with the socio-economic empowerment of the community within a structured series of activities. Therefore, this article aims to describe and analyze the implementation of a 14-day *Kuliah Kerja Nyata* program in Jaranguda Village, Merdeka Sub-district, Karo Regency, focusing on strengthening religious education and community empowerment, while also identifying the outcomes and impacts perceived by the local community.

Research Methods

This community service research employed a qualitative approach with a participatory action research (PAR) design. PAR was selected because it positions the community as active subjects throughout the entire activity cycle rather than merely as passive recipients of the program (Chambers, 1994; Pranata & Wulandari, 2021). This approach aligns with the perspective of Sugiyono (2019), who asserts that qualitative research is capable of understanding social processes in depth within natural contexts. Sudaryono (2019) further emphasizes that participatory action research enables researchers and communities to collaboratively design improvement actions based on real problems identified in the field. Accordingly, the PAR design serves as an appropriate methodological framework for integrating the strengthening of religious education and community empowerment within a single comprehensive community service program.

The participants were residents of Jaranguda Village, Merdeka Sub-district, Karo Regency, selected purposively based on their involvement in religious activities and local economic potential. The inclusion criteria comprised elementary school-aged children attending the Qur'anic Learning Center, mosque youth members, women's study group participants, farmer groups or small enterprise actors, as well as village officials and religious leaders directly involved in program planning. The exclusion criteria included residents who did not maintain permanent residence in the village or were not engaged in community activities during the implementation period. This purposive selection of participants is consistent with Sugiyono's (2019) assertion that samples in qualitative research are chosen based on the richness of information rather than for statistical generalization. Kartika and Simanjuntak (2021) affirm that the active participation of relevant target groups is a critical determinant of the success of community service programs. The involvement of religious leaders and village government officials as strategic partners also strengthens the social legitimacy of the program, as noted by Hasibuan and Nasution (2020).

The instruments employed in this study included participatory observation guidelines, unstructured interview protocols, activity documentation, and field notes. Participatory observation was used to record the dynamics of program implementation, changes in participant behavior, and community responses to each activity. Unstructured interviews were conducted with religious leaders, village officials, and representatives of target groups to explore perceptions and impacts of the program in greater depth.

Documentation in the form of activity photographs, attendance lists, and daily reports served as supporting data to strengthen the validity of the findings. Instrument validity was maintained through source triangulation and technique triangulation, while consistency in data collection adhered to the principles of reliability in qualitative research (Sugiyono, 2019; Emzir, 2018). Pranata and Wulandari (2021) add that in PAR, the researcher serves as the primary instrument interacting directly with the community, making reflexive sensitivity a critical component of the data collection process.

Table I. Schedule of KKN Activity Implementation for 14 Days

Implementation Time	Activities
Day 1	Reception and gathering with Jaranguda Village officials as well as religious leaders and community leaders
Day 2	Field observation and mapping of the religious and socio-economic potential of the community
Day 3	Preparation of community work programs (village deliberations)
Day 4-6	Assistance for the Al-Qur'an Education Park (TPA) and the development of mosque youth
Day 7	Routine recitation with congregation mothers and tahsin training in Qur'an recitation
Day 8-9	Training on processing local agricultural products (coffee and horticulture) for farmer groups/MSMEs
Day 10	Health counseling and clean and healthy lifestyle (PHBS)
Day 11	Mutual cooperation on environmental cleanliness and arrangement of worship facilities
Day 12	Children's religious competitions (adhan, memorization of short letters, calligraphy)
Day 13	Evaluation of the program with village officials and the community
Day 14	Closure and farewell of the KKN program

The implementation procedure followed the PAR cycle, which consists of four main stages:

observation and social mapping, program planning, action implementation, and evaluation and reflection. During the observation stage, students accompanied by supervising lecturers conducted field observations and preliminary interviews to identify the needs and potential of Jaranguda Village. The planning stage was carried out through village deliberations involving village officials, religious leaders, and community representatives to design a work program relevant to local conditions. Program implementation was divided into two main areas, namely strengthening religious education and community empowerment, with a 14-day activity schedule as presented in Table I. The evaluation and reflection stage was conducted participatively to assess program achievements and formulate recommendations for sustainability. This procedure aligns with PAR principles that emphasize the iterative cycle between action and reflection (Chambers, 1994; Pranata & Wulandari, 2021). Sinaga and Silalahi (2019) affirm that involving the community in every stage of planning and evaluation fosters a sense of ownership over the program, thereby enhancing the durability of its impact.

The collected data were analyzed descriptively and qualitatively following the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman, which encompasses data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction was performed by sorting relevant information from field notes, interview transcripts, and activity documentation. Data display was organized in the form of thematic narratives describing the processes and outcomes of program implementation in each activity area. Conclusion drawing was conducted gradually by comparing field findings with previous literature to obtain valid interpretations. Manual coding was applied to identify key themes such as participation, capacity building, and program sustainability without the use of formal qualitative analysis software. This technique is consistent with the views of Sugiyono (2019) and Emzir (2018), who assert that qualitative analysis aims to understand the meanings underlying social phenomena holistically. Moreover, reflective analysis within PAR enables researchers and the community to evaluate changes that occur during the mentoring process (Pranata & Wulandari, 2021).

This study adhered to the principles of research ethics by prioritizing participant consent, data confidentiality, and respect for the social norms of the local community. Prior to implementation, the research team obtained official permission from the Jaranguda Village government and the Institute for Research and Community Service of the university. All participants received an explanation regarding the objectives, procedures, and benefits of the activities and were then asked to provide consent either verbally or in writing. Personal data and interview results were stored securely and used exclusively for academic reporting purposes. The confidentiality of participant identities was maintained by anonymizing names in publications. These ethical considerations refer to the fundamental principles of social research as articulated by Sugiyono (2019) and are reinforced by Kartika and Simanjuntak (2021), who emphasize the importance of informed consent in community service programs. Formal ethical clearance was not required by the proposing institution for low-risk community service activities; however, all procedures adhered to the applicable ethical guidelines.

Result and Discussion

Strengthening Religious Education

The religious education strengthening program was implemented through mentoring at the Qur'anic Learning Center (*Taman Pendidikan Al-Qur'an/TPA*), conducted regularly every afternoon. KKN students assisted in the learning process of reading and memorizing the Qur'an, practicing worship,

and instilling moral values through more varied teaching methods, such as educational games and religious competitions. In addition, mosque youth development was carried out through training in the call to prayer (*adzan*), short sermons (*kultum*), and the management of mosque-based youth activities. Routine religious gatherings with women's study groups were also conducted, focusing on improving Qur'anic recitation (*tahsin*) and delivering light religious studies.

The implementation results showed a significant increase in participation, as presented in Table 2. The number of children and adolescents attending the TPA and mosque youth activities increased from the initial meetings to the end of the program, as did the participation of women's study group members. This finding aligns with the study by Daulay and Siregar (2019), which states that consistent TPA mentoring employing varied methods can enhance the interest and Qur'anic reading skills of elementary school-aged children. Furthermore, this finding reinforces the results of Manurung and Tarigan (2019), who reported that sustained mosque youth development contributes to strengthening the religious character education of the younger generation.

The success of this religious program cannot be separated from the support of local religious leaders who played an active role in motivating the community to participate. This supports the view of Hasibuan and Nasution (2020) that KKN programs involving religious leaders as strategic partners tend to be more readily accepted and sustainable within the community. Nevertheless, the limited implementation period of 14 days posed a challenge in ensuring the continuity of the program after the KKN period concluded, thereby requiring commitment from local cadres to continue the activities that had been initiated.

Community Empowerment

The community empowerment program focused on enhancing the economic capacity and health awareness of the community. Training in the processing of local agricultural products, particularly coffee and horticultural commodities, was provided to farmer groups and small enterprise actors to increase the added value of products prior to marketing. This activity was complemented by education on simple business management and marketing strategies for local products. In addition, health education on clean and healthy living behaviors (*pola hidup bersih dan sehat*/PHBS) was conducted, along with communal environmental clean-up activities and the improvement of worship facilities as efforts to foster collective awareness of environmental cleanliness and health.

Table 2. Community Participation in the KKN Program

Target Group	Number of Participants	Participation Rate
Children and adolescents (TPA & mosque teenagers)	42	Increase
Mothers of the study congregation	28	Increase
Farmer groups/MSMEs	15	Increase
The general public (gotong royong & counseling)	60	Increase

The results of the activities indicate that the community, particularly farmer groups and small

enterprise actors, acquired new knowledge regarding agricultural product processing techniques with greater economic value. This finding is consistent with the results reported by Ginting and Barus (2022) and Nasution and Harahap (2022), who assert that training in the processing of agricultural products based on local wisdom can enhance the economic capacity and self-reliance of rural communities. The communal clean-up activities and health education also received a positive response from the community, in line with the view of Tarigan (2021) that revitalizing the culture of mutual cooperation can serve as important social capital in sustainable village development.



Figure 2. Trophies for children who won the competition

Overall, the synergy between the religious program and the community empowerment program in the implementation of KKN in Jaranguda Village demonstrates that these two aspects complement each other. Strengthening spiritual values through religious education provides a moral foundation for the community in carrying out economic and social activities, while the empowerment program produces tangible impacts on improving community welfare. This reinforces the argument of Sinaga and Silalahi (2019) that thematic KKN models integrating various aspects of community life tend to generate more holistic impacts compared to programs focusing on a single domain. Nevertheless, the sustainability of the program following the completion of KKN remains a challenge that needs to be addressed by both higher education institutions and village governments through continued mentoring.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The implementation of the 14-day Community Service Program in Jaranguda Village successfully strengthened religious education through consistent mentoring at the Qur'anic Learning Center, mosque youth development, and regular religious gatherings, while simultaneously fostering community empowerment through agricultural product processing training, health education, and communal environmental clean-up activities. The findings demonstrate that the synergy between spiritual strengthening and socio-economic empowerment effectively increased community participation and local capacity, thereby addressing the identified gap regarding the limited integration of these two dimensions within a single structured service program. Despite these positive outcomes, the relatively short implementation period constrained the ability to ensure program sustainability after the KKN concluded, and the qualitative nature of the study limited the generalizability of the findings to broader contexts. Future research should therefore employ longitudinal designs to examine the long-term effects of integrated religious and economic empowerment programs, while also considering mixed methods

approaches to quantify participation impacts and explore the role of local cadres in sustaining program outcomes. Higher education institutions and village governments are advised to establish formal mentoring mechanisms and periodic follow-up activities to reinforce the gains achieved during the program. The limitations of this study provide a foundation for improving the design of subsequent community service initiatives, particularly in rural settings with strong religious traditions and underutilized agricultural potential.

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