**THE EFFECTIVENESS OF KIDS SURVIVOR PROGRAM IN DEVELOPING CHILDREN’S CHARACTERS**

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**ABSTRACT**

Strengthening and building character must start from an early age. Character education, both formal and informal, is one way to build quality human character. The purpose of this study is to provide an alternative method of developing and strengthening children's character through nature activities in the Kids Survivor program. Mix Method (quantitative and qualitative) was used to determine the effectiveness of the Kids Survivor program. Based on the test, it was found that each subject had an increased score from before participating in Kids Survivor. Every child experienced improvement in every aspect of character. The conclusion of this study is that activities like the Kids Survivor Program contribute to the formation of children's characters. Each child displayed different scores in changes in aspects of character caused by parenting factors and values ​​believed in the family which had been obtained before joining the program. Parenting patterns, experiences throughout a child's development, as well as values ​​that are believed and planted since childhood will slowly shape the child's character.

**Keywords**: *character, kids survivor, character education*

**Introduction**

Character education has recently become a theme that is often raised in the world of education. Many experts argue that the root of the problems that occur in Indonesia is due to the loss of characters. Problems such as corruption that seems to have no solution, bullying cases, brawls between students or between communities, cheating, violence against others, sexual harassment, drug abuse, misuse of gadgets, illegal cutting of trees, or other simple things like throwing trash out of place, breaking traffic signs, or not being able to wait in line are character-related issues, not to mention the problem of intolerance to differences, be it religion, customs, or differences of opinion.

Character or commonly refers to as characteristics, behavior, personality, are special values that exist within every human being, which are formed from various factors. These characters will determine the point of view, mindset, remarks, attitudes and behavior of a person in everyday life. Good characters are related to knowing the good, loving the good, and acting the good. On the contrary, bad characters are relate to knowing, loving and acting bad (Sudrajat, 2011).

Characters do not just appear, there is a process behind the formation of a character. The process starts from an early age which later will be strongly attached and become an identity in adulthood. No wonder, character is now one of the important points in education in Indonesia, even regulated in the constitution. The constitution number 20 of 2003, Article 3 of the National Education System stated that national education functions to develop abilities and form a character of a dignified nation civilization in order to educate the nation's life. The national education aims to develop the potential of students to become a person who believes and fears God Almighty as well as become a person who is noble, healthy, knowledgeable, capable, creative, independent and become a democratic and responsible citizen.

All activities, both formal and informal, carry on behalf of character formation. But the reality that happens is beyond expectations as social problems are now increasing. Kardiman (2013) argues that large and small-scale problems are rooted in characters that are not perfectly formed. In line with previous argument, Wijaya and Hellaudin (2018) said that the problems that occur is due to the failure of the character education model implemented so far.

Character education is a conscious and planned human effort to educate and empower the potential of students to build their personal characters so that they can become individuals who benefit themselves and their environment. Character education should start from the home environment, which is from parenting by parents and then strengthened from the environment outside the home environment. The education is carried out both formally and informally, like schools or educational institutions, communities, training sites and so on.

Character education is not only taught in the form of theory or just additional knowledge but also as character education that must be done directly by involving aspects of human development, such as physical and social emotional. Stimulation for physical aspects can be done by optimizing all human sensory functions, such as sensory (vision, hearing, smell, touch and touch) and motoric (with active movements). In addition, emotional social stimulation can be done by interacting directly with other people other than themselves.

One technique in character education that can involve all aspects of development is to have activities in nature. Having activities in nature is in one of the learning medias to strengthen human characteristics which are not obtained in the classroom. By having activities in nature, people directly learn from their environment, this will develop the potentials and talents that are hidden in every human being (Maulana, 2016).

Some studies prove that having activities in nature can provide many benefits, such as improving sleep patterns, increasing energy, training concentration and building confidence (Nathania, 2017). Research conducted by Taylor, Kuo and Sullivan (in Kinanthi & Arlikansari, 2018) stated that individuals who lived in houses with green scenery showed high discipline. Research conducted by Kinanthi and Arlikansari also shows that individuals who get nature (natural) stimulus, have a more positive emotional response compared to individuals who get environmental stimulus purposely made by humans.

Many agencies or educational foundations are starting to open schools with natural-based management. In urban areas, such a system is in great demand because it looks more interesting. In Aceh, schools involving nature have been opened and are glimpsed by some people who realize the importance of children having activities in nature. In Banda Aceh, one of the places that provide opportunities for children to play in the wild is a Bintang Kecil Foundation through the Kids Survivor (KS) program that has started since 2018.

Kids Survivor is an educational process that uses the free nature as a means to build character and children’s nature abilities. The Kids Survivor Program is carried out for children in age range of 8-14 years old. In this age range, children have begun forming attitudes, characters, interests, as well as accepting knowledge. The Kids Survivor Program uses fun, child-friendly methods in developing characters and loving the environment, respecting children in accordance with their nature. Characters that want to be developed in the Kids Survivor program are based on 5 pillars.

The five pillars are, first, resilient, which includes (a) emotional regulation, (b) the ability to control encouragement, (c) optimistic, (d) problem analysis, (e) empathy, and (f), achievement (Reivich & Shatte, 2002). Second, Solidarity can be seen from mutual help, mutual care, cooperation, namely team work (Nasution, 2009). Third, independent with indicators in the form of (a) confident, (b) able to work alone, (c) appreciate time, (d) responsible, (e) has a desire to compete for advanced, and (f) able to make a decision (Suid, Syafrina, & Tursinawati (2017). Fourth, environmentally knowledgeable, a person's perspective on everything that affects the growth of living things, including a perspective in management, utilization, environmental preservation (Setiawan, 2012). Fifth, specially skilled person who has the ability or cleverness in certain fields (Setiawan, 2012).

The Kids Survivor program is divided into 4 levels, level 1 (beginner), level 2 (capable), level 3 (competent), and level 4 (expert). At each level, there are indicators of achievement, the materials that will be taught, the form of activities to the output produced before moving to the next level. All of these are combined according to the 5 (five) pillars mentioned above.

In its process, Kids Survivor has had 3 generations including children who have taken Kids Survivor level 1 which was held in the Gunung Seulawah Inong area, Saree Aceh Besar, in collaboration with Taman Hutan Raya (TAHURA) as the facilitator and educator. Then, it continued at the Kids Survivor level 2. This level was done in the Krueng Sabee, Aceh Jaya Watershed Restoration Area, this activity is supported and in collaboration with the Aceh Natural Resources Conservation Agency, Aceh Natural Forest and Environment, Foundation and the Krueng Sabe Watershed Forum as partners who assist in providing facilities and infrastructure as well as experts. After that, it continued to level 3 which was done in Gunung Leuser National Park research station, Ketambe, Southeast Aceh (Results of an interview with Maria Ulfa, Chair of the Bintang Kecil Foundation and the activities mentor, February 28, 2019).

This study aims to find an alternative educational method in developing children's character according to their nature and to find out how much effectiveness it has on children's character. Therefore, the problem formulation of this research focuses on whether the Kids Survivor program is effective in developing character and environmental awareness in children.

**Method**

To determine the effectiveness of the Kids Survivor program, Mix Method research method was used. It consists of qualitative methods used to describe the character of children before and after participating in the Kids Survivor program. Data collection techniques were through observation. Meanwhile, the quantitative one was seen from the measurement of the extent of changes that occur edafter participating in the Kids Survivor program by evaluating the results from before joining the program and after being given the program.

In this study, the respondents were 12 participants of the Kids Survivor batch 2018, who had completed 4 levels of the Kids Survivor program from level 1 to level 4. The selection of respondents was based on certain characteristics (Sugiyono, 2014). The respondent criteria set were students aged 8-15 years who had participated in Kids Survivor activities from level 1 to level 4.

Changes in each respondent were measured using a measuring instrument in the form of a questionnaire with 2 answer choices, namely Yes-No. The assessment was done by one of the parents' representatives by filling out the questionnaire. Assessment was also done by mentors during the Kids Survivor education process as supporting data. Data collection from mentors was done by interview. The interview was conducted to obtain information about the subject's behavior from the beginning until the end of Kids Survivor Program. The results of the data were then scored to see changes before and after participating in the Kids Survivor. Measurements were made by comparing scores before and after participating in the Kids Survivor program for each respondent.

**Result**

Based on the the measurement that has been done, data on changes in each aspect of the characters which were studied are obtained. The results of this study can be seen in the following graph:

**Graphic 1.**

**Comparison of Scores of Pretest and Posttest Character Participating in Kids Survivor**

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**Graphic 2.**

**Comparison of Scores of Pretest and Posttest Character Participating in Kids Survivor in Percentage**

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Based on the graphics and tables above, it can be seen that each subject has an increased score from before participating in the KS. Every child experienced improvement from every aspect. The mentors said that KS students experienced a lot of changes compared to when they first participated in the KS at level 1. Most of the participants were still very unfamiliar with the outdoors because they were not used to the situations and conditions in nature. At level 1, students must adapt to something new, such as new friends, new environments and conditions. Likewise at level 2, there is still no significant change, there were still some participants who were not comfortable with the conditions in nature. However, several aspects such as teamwork and the responsibilities of each student have started to show.

The three mentors agree that the changes will appear when the participants are at level 4 and when the students have completed the KS program. Where most of the participants have begun to be able to adapt to situations and conditions which are different from the environment they usually encounter, such as having the courage to appear, express opinions in public, present their work, dare to take decisions and the risks that will be faced, dare to take challenges to taking part in a competition, such as participating in the writing of scientific papers for youth held by the Center of Young Scientists (CYS) where they won 1st place in the environmental category, 2nd place in the economics and life sciences category, and 3rd place in the environmental category psychology. Still according to the mentors, the students were more visible with the special skills possessed by each student, such as the ability to become an educator, the ability as an observer, the ability to speak in public, and other changes.

According to the results of interviews with parents, all parents assessed that many changes occurred after their children took KS. Indeed, not all aspects of attitude and character (resilient, independent, team work, environmental insight and special skills) experienced significant changes, but there were also changes that emerged from the calculated scores. Some of the changes expressed by KS parents include having the courage to use public transportation (Trans Kuta Raja, Gojek, Grab) when they want to travel, no longer relying on their parents, willing to live in situations/conditions that are not as comfortable as it is at home; no air-conditioner, no mattresses, no exclusive food, or with minimal facilities. Besides, they have also been seen as initiative in solving problems, dare to take action and decisions along with the risks they will face. In addition, all students started to be courageous to express their wishes and dislikes appropriately, and they were able to control and manage emotions.

In terms of knowledge about nature, participants who participated in the KS program showed an increase in their knowledge of nature, especially about flora and fauna that had been observed or were the object of observation.

Viewed from every aspect, there is an increase in the score on the resilience aspect. The average increase of the 12 students was 9.15% although there were students whose changes were not too significant. This means that before participating in the KS program, the student already had indicators that showed resilience. However, there were also students who showed a significant change from before participating in the KS program, which was 13.41%. In the aspect of solidarity, only one student showed a significant change for 8.64%. Meanwhile, other students also showed changes but not too significant.

The independence aspect also experienced an increase in the score of each student except for one student named LT. The student showed no change both before and after participating in the KS program. This means that even before participating in the KS, LT was already quite independent. While another student, showed a very significant change. This is in contrast to what was conveyed by the mentors who assisted in the field. Mentors said that when they were at level 1 to 3, it seemed that most of LT’s activities had to be helped and depended on other people. However, entering level 4, his independence began to appear, he is no longer too dependent on his close friends.

In the aspect of environmental knowledge, almost all students got the maximum score after participating in the KS program. Meanwhile, before participating in the KS program, most of the students got a minimum score, meaning that the student did not know anything about the environment before. Only one student, KH, reached the maximum score. This means that before participating in the KS program, that student already had knowledge about the environment.

In the aspect of special skills, almost all students in the pretest did not have special skills yet, especially the ones which are related to skills in nature. Therefore, when participating in the KS program, students just started to get to know and learn new skills.

**Discussion**

Character is seen as an interesting theme to be developed and strengthened as a way to save the nation. The number of phenomena of immoral cases is suspected to arise due to the declining balance between cognitive intelligence, feelings, and actions. Thus, many individuals are unable to live and cooperate with the surrounding environment. Behavioral problems such as lying, being irresponsible, lacking discipline, breaking the law, lacking manners, being ignorant to others, giving up easily, having intolerance, and others are problems that can be solved by strengthening individual character.

Character is the key to many of these behavioral problems that arise. Character is often referred to by other terms such as characteristics, behavior, or personality where it becomes the unique and distinctive values attached to a person. Character determines how individuals perceive and interact with the world outside themselves. Therefore, it is necessary to develop and shape character through character education which since 2017 has been planned by the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia as a pillar in improving the nation's character. Character education itself aims to help individuals become human beings with good character from the dimensions of heart, thought, body, taste and intention (Wahyu in Fauzi, Zainuddin, & Al Atok, 2017).

The character itself is formed through a long process, so that the character can last a long time. Character is influenced by several things, including family, school, and community (Prasanti & Fitriani, 2018). The family is the first step for a character to be formed where parenting is an important thing to pay attention to. Parents are required to work together to consistently carry out parenting which aims to plant good qualities and positive values within their children (Ginanjar, 2013). Good parenting will shape children’s personality which will later become a character that lasts a lifetime (Anisah, 2011).

The second one is school. School is the environment after family that becomes a place for children to see the world. Unfortunately, now many cases related to character crises occur in schools. For this reason, parents need to be more selective in choosing a healthy school environment for their children.

The third one is community. Community in *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia Daring* (Online Indonesian Dictionary) is defined as a group of organisms (people and so on) that live and interact with each other in a certain area; public; association (https://kbbi.kemdikbud.go.id, downloaded 05 December 2020). A community is usually a place where individuals spend some time together with a group of people who share a common hobby or passion.

Based on the results of the study, it was found that activities like the Kids Survivor program contributed to the formation of children's characters. Changes that occur before and after taking KS indicate an increase in abilities and soft skills. From the results of the interview, it was found that achieving the 5 pillars of character that become the indicators of Kids Survivor cannot only need a short time. However, students need to participate in a series of activities that have been designed accordingly to the objectives which need to be achieved. This is in accordance with what Suparno (2018) stated, that with the environment, humans learn to act and behave ethically. Environmental factors will strengthen, reduce or eliminate innate traits that have been owned since birth. Based on the results of research conducted by Suparno, it shows that the social environment has an effect of 72%, parenting 18%, and the learning environment has an effect of 22% on character formation.

That means Kids Survivor as a community which is a learning environment as well as a social environment also provides additional stimulation for children to strengthen characters that have appeared before and form characters that have not yet emerged.

As shown in the graphic of environmental insight and special skills, almost all of the students have not had environmental knowledge and special skills, but changes occur when participating in a series of activities carried out in Kids Survivor. This is also supported by statements from parents and mentors as assistants in the field who said that most of the students who took the KS initially did not know about nature and the skills they had in studying nature. However, they started to know after participating in the program of activities carried out by KS.

Character formation is different for each individual because it is influenced by the factors previously mentioned, it makes different changes among students. As seen in the chart for the aspects of resilience, independence and solidarity. Changes in the scores obtained are different for each student, this happens because previously those students had developed character aspects before participating in the KS program. However, it is not the case with other students. This difference occurs because it is influenced by parenting patterns and values believed in the family. Parenting patterns, experiences, and values that are believed and planted since childhood will slowly shape the child's character.

**Conclusion**

 Character is seen as the basis of human interaction with the environment. Characters are obtained from the educational process done at home, at school, as well as in the surrounding environment. Characters that are developed through activities in the open, with the outdoors, and through natural learning can help children grow well, in terms of being more regulated emotionally, having better awareness and sensitivity of the environment, developing empathy between others well, being more independent, and encouraging children to better know their skills and themselves.

Kids Survivor as a place for children to know and learn through nature contributes to the development of children's character. However, parenting and the family environment are no less important in influencing the development of children’s good characters.

**Suggestion**

Character formation does not occur in a short time, it takes habituation to form a character. This habituation can be done by providing opportunities for children to do positive activities.

Children learn to behave from the process of observing, especially from the closest environment. Therefore, it is important for parents to be role models for children in shaping their child's character.

Furthermore, another suggestion related to this research is that this research should be carried out on an ongoing program so that the differences before and after participating in the Kids Survivor program can be more measured.

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