

DIGITAL LITERACY TRAINING FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES: ENHANCING WELFARE IN THE DIGITAL ERA

Mutawakkil^{1*}, Nuraedah¹, Charless Kapile¹, Nurvita¹, Iskandar Akhmad¹

¹Fakultas Keguruan dan Ilmu Pendidikan, Universitas Tadulako
.Jl. Soekarno Hatta No.KM. 9, Tondo, Kec. Mantikulore, Kota Palu, Sulawesi Tengah 94148 -
Indonesia

*Corresponding Author: : mutawakkil@untad.ac.id

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ABSTRACT Advancements in information and communication technology have brought significant changes to various aspects of life. However, rural communities often lag behind in utilizing technology due to low digital literacy. This article discusses the importance of digital literacy training for rural communities, the implementation methods, and its impact on community welfare. The results indicate that digital literacy can improve information access, support the local economy, and reduce the digital divide.

KEYWORDS: *Digital Literacy, Rural Communities, Empowerment, Digital Divide, Technology.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Advancements in information and communication technology have transformed various life aspects, from education and healthcare to the economy. Technology creates opportunities to enhance efficiency, accessibility, and productivity. However, not all segments of society can equally benefit from these advancements. Rural communities often face barriers in accessing technology due to inadequate infrastructure and a lack of knowledge or skills to utilize it. Digital literacy becomes a key solution to overcoming these challenges. With digital literacy, rural communities can leverage technology to access information, market local products, and support education (Hague & Payton, 2010).

In the digital era, digital literacy is a fundamental skill. It includes not only technical abilities to use technological devices but also critical understanding to access, evaluate, and utilize information effectively. The low level of digital literacy among rural communities is one of the main obstacles preventing them from fully participating in economic and social development.

This issue is exacerbated by the digital divide between urban and rural areas, evident in differences in access to technological devices like computers and smartphones and the ability to use technology productively. Urban communities typically have more access to technology training and education, while rural areas often lag due to limited facilities and resources.

Low digital literacy also affects rural communities' ability to address global challenges such as climate change, food security, and access to healthcare. On the other hand, opportunities to use technology as an empowerment tool are abundant. For instance, farmers can use digital applications to obtain weather forecasts, market prices, and better farming techniques. However, all these require adequate digital literacy.

Thus, digital literacy training is a strategic step to empower rural communities to adapt to changing times. With proper training, rural communities can improve their quality of life in economic, educational, and social aspects. Digital literacy not only bridges the digital divide but also serves as a pathway to a more prosperous and inclusive future for rural areas.

2. METHOD

The implementation of digital literacy training follows systematic stages to ensure its effectiveness and impact on rural communities.

- a. **Needs Assessment:** Surveys are conducted to understand the specific needs and current digital literacy levels of the target communities. This information is crucial for determining the focus and priorities of the training, following UNESCO's (2018) recommendations.
- b. **Curriculum Development:** Training materials are designed based on the needs assessment results. The curriculum includes basic skills like using smartphones and the internet and more advanced abilities like utilizing social media and e-commerce. This approach aligns with Buckingham's (2015) findings on the importance of relevant training content.
- c. **Stakeholder Collaboration:** Collaboration with local governments, educational institutions, and NGOs is essential. Their involvement ensures the availability of adequate resources, including facilities, trainers, and technological devices.
- d. **Participatory Training:** Participants are actively engaged in learning and directly practicing digital skills. This approach fosters confidence in using technology and includes interactive activities, discussions, and practical simulations to make it easier for rural communities to grasp.
- e. **Evaluation and Mentoring:** Post-training evaluations are conducted to measure program success and goal achievement. Participants are also mentored to ensure they can apply the

acquired skills in daily life. This step is critical to ensuring the long-term impact of the training.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Result

Digital literacy training has had significant positive impacts on rural communities in the following aspects:

Economic Welfare Improvement

Digital literacy training enables rural communities to utilize technology in their economic activities. For instance, farmers use agricultural apps to monitor weather, access market information, and obtain technical guidance on better farming practices. Many participants also began using e-commerce platforms to sell local products, such as handicrafts, traditional food, and agricultural produce. By leveraging these technologies, incomes have increased, and new job opportunities have emerged, particularly in logistics and online store management.

Education Enhancement

Digital literacy significantly improves access to education in rural areas. Children and teenagers can now use online learning platforms to access additional learning materials, attend online courses, and prepare better for exams. Parents, previously unfamiliar with technology, can now support their children in utilizing it for educational purposes, directly improving education quality in rural communities.

Social Awareness and Community Empowerment:

The training helps rural communities understand social and global issues better. For instance, by using social media, people become more aware of environmental conservation, waste management, and sustainability programs. Communities also form digital groups to share information on health, education, and business opportunities.

Reducing the Digital Divide

One of the most significant impacts of this training is bridging the digital divide between rural and urban areas. Improved digital literacy allows rural communities to connect more effectively at both local and international levels. This opportunity also enables them to build broader networks, accessing previously unreachable opportunities.

The participatory approach proved highly effective in the training process. By actively involving participants, the training provided knowledge and built confidence and independence.

This creates a long-term impact where participants continue learning independently and even become mentors for other community members.

3.2 Discussion

Digital literacy training has been proven to have a significant positive impact on rural communities in Indonesia, particularly in addressing the challenges of the digital era. Various aspects of community life have undergone transformation, ranging from improved economic well-being and strengthened education to reduced digital divides.

One of the most notable impacts is the improvement in the economic well-being of rural communities. Digital literacy provides access to technologies that support economic activities, such as agricultural applications that help farmers monitor weather, access market information, and implement more modern farming practices. Additionally, many training participants have started utilizing e-commerce platforms to sell local products, including handicrafts, traditional foods, and agricultural produce. By leveraging this technology, community income has increased significantly. Furthermore, the training has also created new job opportunities, such as in logistics and online store management. This supports Heeks' (2017) argument that digital technology has great potential to empower local economies.

On the other hand, digital literacy also strengthens access to education in rural areas. Through the use of online learning platforms, children and teenagers in rural areas now have the opportunity to access additional learning materials, take online courses, and better prepare for exams. Parents who previously lacked technological understanding are now beginning to support their children in utilizing digital devices for educational purposes. This impact not only improves the quality of individual education but also brings positive changes to the community as a whole, as explained by Selwyn (2012).

Through this training, rural communities have also become more aware of social and global issues, such as the importance of environmental conservation, waste management, and supporting sustainability programs. The use of social media has encouraged the formation of online discussion groups where communities share information about health, education, and business opportunities. This aligns with the findings of Livingstone (2004) and Nuraedah (2020), which highlight the potential of digital literacy in strengthening community ties and building collective awareness.

The training also plays a crucial role in enhancing social awareness and community empowerment. Rural communities are now more conscious of social and global issues, such as environmental preservation, waste management, and sustainability programs. The use of social media has encouraged the formation of online discussion groups, where communities share

information on health, education, and business opportunities. This is consistent with Nuraedah's (2020) findings, which emphasize that digital literacy has the ability to integrate communities into global networks while reinforcing a sense of local community identity. Nuraedah (2019) also notes that community-based digital literacy programs contribute to fostering a sense of ownership over technology, making communities more proactive in addressing social challenges. Furthermore, Nuraedah and Hasbullah (2021) highlight that empowerment through digital literacy can enhance community involvement in sustainability issues, particularly in environmental management and technology-based economic planning.

One of the most fundamental impacts of this training is the reduction of the digital divide between rural and urban communities. With increasing digital literacy skills, rural communities can now access global information and build broader networks. They no longer feel isolated, either in terms of information or communication. This allows them to connect with opportunities that were previously out of reach.

The success of digital literacy training is inseparable from the participatory approach applied. By actively involving communities in the learning process, this training not only serves as a means of knowledge transfer but also builds confidence and independence. Training participants are not just beneficiaries but are also capable of continuing the learning process independently and even acting as mentors for other community members. This approach creates sustainable impacts that enhance local capacity to utilize technology productively (Nuraedah, 2022).

4. CONCLUSION

Digital literacy training is a strategic step to empower rural communities in the digital era. With adequate digital skills, these communities can enhance their economic, educational, and social quality of life. Collaborative efforts from various stakeholders are crucial to ensure sustainable and impactful outcomes. Digital literacy serves as a bridge towards smarter, more independent, and prosperous rural communities in the digital age..

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