



The Role of Educators in Improving the Nutritional Knowledge of Early Childhood at TK Muslimat NU Pamekasan

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ABSTRACT

Early childhood nutrition education is essential to support their optimal growth and development. Good nutrition knowledge in children can prevent various health problems such as stunting and obesity. However, despite the abundance of literature emphasizing the importance of nutrition education in children, practices on the ground often do not align with theory, especially at the early childhood education level. Many children are still exposed to unhealthy eating habits due to a lack of understanding about nutrition. This study aims to identify the role of educators in improving early childhood nutrition knowledge at Muslimat NU Pamekasan Kindergarten. The method used was a descriptive qualitative approach with in-depth interviews with educators, parents, and school managers, as well as observation of activities at school. The main findings of this study show that educators have an important role in introducing the concept of balanced nutrition through activities such as eating together, providing nutritious food, and nutrition counseling. However, challenges such as low parental awareness, limited economic conditions, and unhealthy snacking habits outside of school are inhibiting factors. Improving children's nutritional knowledge requires collaboration between educators, parents and the surrounding environment to create a sustainable healthy lifestyle.

INTRODUCTION

Health should be a top priority in life. One way to maintain health is to ensure the cleanliness of the living environment and the food consumed. It is important to pay attention to the nutritional content of food to ensure that children provide good stimulation for memory, especially in children. proper and balanced food in nutrition will provide great benefits to the body and increase satiety for a longer period of time (Susanti & Kholisokh, 2018). Health development as part of efforts to build a whole human being is organized through efforts to foster children's health from an early age through maternal and child health, maternal health development in marriage, during pregnancy and childbirth is intended to produce healthy and potentially resilient offspring. Early childhood health development from the womb to toddler age is intended to protect children from the threat of death and illness that can lead to disability and to improve the quality of life so that children achieve optimal growth and development.

Implementing nutrition education interventions targeting educators has shown promise in improving their knowledge and practices. Such interventions can lead to better nutrition education for children, ultimately enhancing children's nutrition knowledge and eating behaviors (Pontes et al., 2022). In ancient times humans have begun to recognize the importance of life. Evidenced by the assumption of the importance of food, at that time the assumption was taboo because it was accompanied by magical elements and believed that the food eaten could cure the disease. Then the development of nutrition as a branch of science proposed by Todhunter with the starting point of the function of food for life. Formally, nutrition as a part of science that may develop starting from the writings of Hippocrates who stated that in essence the food that has actually been eaten is a provider of elements that are needed by humans or in other words food as heat that humans need (Proverawati, 2017).

Nutritional conditions are the result of the food consumed and the benefits of nutrients obtained by individuals and populations and then affect the health and well-being of children. According to the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Indonesia, one method to assess nutritional conditions is through the measurement of body mass index (Khairizka, 2018). The World Health Organization (WHO) classifies nutritional problems as 2, namely, malnutrition which includes stunting, underweight and vitamin and mineral deficiencies, overweight, obesity, and obesity (Sapa, et al., 2020). One of the issues facing children in Indonesia is health. Children's health is not only related to the absence of disease or physical limitations. Children's health has a significant impact on the progress of a nation. Healthy children have the ability to receive and process information well, which in turn will increase their intelligence (Departemen Pendidikan Nasional RI & Nasional., 2020). On the other hand, there are still many challenges related to child health in Indonesia such as the high number of health problems in early childhood that have not received adequate treatment and access to health services that are still lacking. In dealing with this problem, serious efforts are needed that involve various sectors, especially in Early Childhood Education (PAUD).

In a nutritious and balanced portion of food will greatly affect the growth and development of children in their golden age. The more nutritious the food that children consume, the faster and faster their growth and development will be. However, children who are overnourished will be obese while malnourished children will experience stunting (Laras, 2020). Early Childhood Education (PAUD) is a coaching effort aimed at children from birth to the age of 6 years which is carried out through the provision of educational stimuli to help physical and spiritual growth and development so that children have readiness to enter further education (Permendiknas No.58, 2009). Most children in school tend to consume a lot of food and light snacks which can eventually cause children to get sick. Although food and snacks can be allowed as snacks, it is important that they still contain the nutrients needed by the body. Children under five years old are included in the group that is prone to health and nutrition problems. Therefore, children need special attention and supervision of health conditions and nutritional status.

Nutritious and balanced food and intensive stimulation are needed for children's developmental growth. The food given to children in order to grow and develop optimally should be nutritious food, including : staple foods as a source of energy, side dishes as a

source of building materials, vegetables as a source of regulating substances, milk and eggs (Putri, 2015). Providing nutritious food is very important for preschool children to monitor the extent of the child's ability to consume food that is appropriate for the child's age. Without nutritious food intake, children's physical and mental growth can be disrupted. Therefore, as educators, it is important to understand how to provide healthy nutrition to children according to their developmental stages.

The role of educators in introducing nutritious food to early childhood is essential with the aim that children can recognize a variety of healthy foods so that children are more resistant to disease. Generally, parents only give pocket money to children without paying attention to whether the snacks purchased by children contain nutrition or not, because children tend to focus only on consumption. Therefore, it is the responsibility of educators to provide learning about the importance of recognizing nutritious food to children. Besides that, educators are also a figure in the world of education, especially when there is a process of teaching and learning interaction with children, for example in learning about the introduction of nutritious food to early childhood.

Educators must also have professional competence because professional educators are educators who have great responsibility for their students and have the ability to develop themselves in improving the quality of learning and educating children. In introducing nutritious foods, the task of educators is to introduce various kinds of nutritious foods to be consumed by children and the benefits of food for the body that has balanced nutrition for the development and growth of children (Hartini, 2020).

In this study, researchers chose a school location at the Muslimat NU Sumedangan Kindergarten institution, Pademawu District, Pamekasan Regency because there are several things that must be considered again in the role of educators, especially in the context of early childhood nutritional knowledge, at the institution has also been accredited B and is very suitable for research. There are also several reasons that make researchers choose these institutions, namely that these institutions have begun to introduce healthy foods to children's nutrition but are still lacking in increasing their nutritional knowledge, this is evidenced by the difficulty of educators providing nutritional knowledge to children due to several factors, namely environmental, family and school factors. The nutritional knowledge of educators at the Muslimat NU Kindergarten is fairly minimal and is still not fully realized for children.

The purpose of this study is to identify and analyze how educators at Muslimat NU Kindergarten play a role in improving early childhood nutrition knowledge. This study also aims to find out the efforts made by educators in conveying information related to the importance of nutrition for children's development. In addition, this study also seeks to explore the challenges faced by educators in the process of learning about nutrition, as well as the impact of teaching on children's understanding of the importance of nutritious food.

This research has differences with previous research. There are several differences seen from aspects and methods including the focus of research. Previous research focused on the role of educators in introducing nutritious food in early childhood at Rafiq El Khoeriyah Ambender Pegantenan Pamekasan Kindergarten (Sofiyah, 2022). Thus, the results of this research are expected to provide insight into the effectiveness of the role of educators in

supporting early childhood development through increasing knowledge about healthy and nutritious nutrition.

METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach, this research procedure that produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from people and behaviors that need to be observed (Mekarisce, 2020). The process of collecting data through observation, interviews, and documentation. The data that researchers collect in this study is information directly taken from respondents. The data collection process was carried out through observation, interviews, and documentation. The observations made included the condition of the school environment, the children's family environment, and the nutritional intake received by the children, with the aim of digging up information about the role of educators in improving the nutritional knowledge of early childhood. In addition, to strengthen the analysis, researchers also collected documentation in the form of photos, archives, or other evidence that could support this research. The location of this research is at the Muslimat NU Sumedangan Kindergarten, Pademawu District, Pamekasan Regency. This research was conducted in October 2024.

RESULT

Based on the results of the research that the researchers have conducted, the results obtained from the observation and interview process show that the role of educators at the Muslimat NU Pamekasan Kindergarten is very good. Educators act as facilitators, initiators, informers, directors of learning and evaluators who are active in assisting children and trying to provide education that is not only related to academic knowledge but also pays attention to children's nutritional needs. Educators have taken various measures to ensure that children receive balanced knowledge and adequate and nutritious nutrition. One positive step identified was the involvement of one of the educators in the posyandu cadre, which plays an important role in facilitating improved nutritional knowledge in early childhood. This involvement allows the educator to directly access relevant information and apply it in daily activities at school.

In addition, educators also introduce local fruits and vegetables to the children, utilizing the potential of the school's surrounding environment which is rich in banana trees and moringa leaves. This not only gives children the opportunity to learn about nutrition but also allows them to get to know the food around them firsthand. This is a very positive effort to instill healthy living habits from an early age. The main supporting and inhibiting factors that the researchers found were the training of educators on nutrition as well as the regular analysis of children's development. However, inhibiting factors include parents' lack of awareness about the importance of nutrition, economic limitations and the presence of unhealthy snacks around the school. In addition, unhealthy eating habits at home are also a challenge.

DISCUSSION

1.1 The Role of Educators in Improving Early Childhood Nutrition Knowledge at Muslimat NU Kindergarten Pamekasan

1.1.1 Educator as Facilitator

From the results of the research conducted, it was found that the role of educators at Muslimat NU Pamekasan Kindergarten as facilitators in improving early childhood nutrition knowledge has been running well and effectively. Educators not only provide information about nutrition but also create an environment that supports children's development through fun and interactive approaches such as eating together and cooking together. There are several aspects of the role of educators at the Muslimat NU Pamekasan Kindergarten as facilitators: first, providing interactive and fun learning so that educators at the Muslimat NU Pamekasan Kindergarten not only teach nutrition theory but also create a fun learning experience. Through activities such as gardening and cooking together, educators help children recognize nutritious food ingredients and how to cook them, so that they understand healthy eating patterns practically in everyday life. Second, using methods that are appropriate to the child's developmental stage, educators at Muslimat NU Pamekasan Kindergarten organize learning activities according to the developmental stage of early childhood using educational games to teach the benefits of nutritious food and introduce healthy food types in a fun way.

The role of the teacher as a facilitator is how a teacher plays a role in providing various services including the availability of adequate facilities to facilitate teaching and learning activities for students. In addition to the task of teaching and shaping students into intelligent individuals, educators also act as role models for children. The form of educator activities as a facilitator is to provide services that facilitate children in the learning process. This involves creating learning activities that are appropriate for children's development, so that interactions in the teaching and learning process can run effectively. The role of educators as facilitators includes the following things: listening and having patience, approaching children and being familiar, and maintaining authority and impartiality (Hertina, 2020).

Indicators of teacher success as a facilitator, namely educators organize all learning tools, including syllabus, curriculum, lesson plans (RPP), teaching materials, evaluation, and assessment, educators provide learning facilities which include methods, media, and learning equipment, educators act as partners in the learning process, not as superiors, educators carry out their duties and roles in accordance with applicable laws, educators do not act arbitrarily towards students (Shofiya & Sartika, 2020).

1.1.2 Educator as Initiator

As initiators, educators at Muslimat NU Pamekasan Kindergarten play an important role in initiating and initiating various programs aimed at improving early childhood nutrition knowledge. Educators do not just wait for instructions from outside parties, but educators at Muslimat NU Pamekasan Kindergarten actively identify nutrition education needs that are in accordance with the conditions and characteristics of children at the school. Educators at Muslimat NU Pamekasan Kindergarten start new programs such as gardening classes, cooking together, or inviting nutritionists to provide education to children and parents. In addition, educators at Muslimat NU Pamekasan Kindergarten also took the initiative to establish partnerships with external parties, such as community health centers or posyandu, to support nutrition education activities at school. Educators at Muslimat NU Pamekasan Kindergarten also initiate activities that involve parents, such as parenting classes or counseling on the importance of child nutrition. Through these initiatives, educators at Muslimat NU

Pamekasan Kindergarten not only provide knowledge but also build awareness and involvement of parents and the community in supporting children's healthy diet. Thus, educators at Muslimat NU Pamekasan Kindergarten function as the main driving force that initiates change and creates a culture of healthy living in the school environment.

The role of educators as initiators is how educators should be able to choose and develop teaching materials that are in accordance with the objectives to be achieved. This role is also very important in creating updates to the teaching materials that are owned so that they can improve the quality of learning, which will also affect the quality of the generation that will be produced. Innovation in education also helps educators to correct weaknesses in the current education system. By adopting new technologies and teaching methods, educators can correct problems such as inequality in education and the difficulty of overcoming different learning problems among children. Innovation can also help educators to tailor teaching to children's individual needs, enabling more inclusive and effective education. In a changing world, innovation is key to achieving progress in education and helping children to reach their full potential (Syafaruddin, et al., 2016).

1.1.3 Educator as Informer

The role of educators as informants at Muslimat NU Pamekasan Kindergarten in improving early childhood nutrition knowledge is very important because educators are tasked with providing correct and easy-to-understand information about the importance of nutrition for children's growth and development. Educators at Muslimat NU Pamekasan Kindergarten actively deliver material about nutrition in an interesting way and in accordance with the developmental stage of children using various media such as pictures, songs and stories to explain the types of nutritious foods, their benefits, and healthy eating habits. In addition, educators at Muslimat NU Pamekasan Kindergarten provide information that is appropriate to the context of children's lives, such as introducing them to healthy foods around them and the importance of choosing nutritious foods to support body health. As informants, educators at Muslimat NU Pamekasan Kindergarten also ensure that children not only gain theoretical knowledge, but also understanding that can be applied in daily life.

Through practical activities such as gardening, cooking, or eating together, educators at Muslimat NU Pamekasan Kindergarten teach children to recognize and choose healthy food directly. Information provided by educators is not only limited to school, but also involves parents. Educators at Muslimat NU Pamekasan Kindergarten hold counseling activities and parenting classes to provide information to parents about the importance of healthy eating at home. In this way, educators at Muslimat NU Pamekasan Kindergarten not only act as a source of information for children, but also expand the understanding of nutrition to parents and the surrounding community so as to create a broader awareness of healthy eating patterns.

Educators should be able to provide information on the development of science and technology, in addition to a number of learning materials for each subject that has been programmed in the curriculum. A good informant is an educator who understands the needs of students and serves students. In other words, although educators have not provided materials tailored to students with learning difficulties, educators provide information about subject matter with a delivery that attracts students' enthusiasm for learning (Djamarah, 2008).

1.1.4 Educator as Director of Learning

Educators at Muslimat NU Pamekasan Kindergarten play the role of director of learning in improving early childhood nutrition knowledge by designing and

directing the learning process in accordance with children's developmental stages. As a director, educators at Muslimat NU Pamekasan Kindergarten ensure that the material presented about nutrition is easy to understand and relevant to children's lives. Educators at Muslimat NU Pamekasan Kindergarten also provide instructions in every activity that involves children, such as educational games and other activities aimed at introducing healthy food and good eating habits. Educators at Muslimat NU Pamekasan Kindergarten not only direct children to learn passively, but also encourage children's active involvement in practical activities such as cooking or gardening. In this way, educators at Muslimat NU Pamekasan Kindergarten help children to apply nutrition knowledge in their daily lives. In addition, educators at Muslimat NU Pamekasan Kindergarten direct children to understand the relationship between healthy food and body growth and health in order to create good eating habits from an early age.

Among the other roles of educators is also the educator's role as a director. educators as directors here in the sense of how teachers are able to direct their students in solving their problems and directing students in the decision-making process. every teacher is expected to be good at directing student learning activities in order to achieve learning success or academic performance (Sardiman, 2008).

1.1.5 Educator as Evaluator

Educators at Muslimat NU Pamekasan Kindergarten also act as evaluators in improving early childhood nutrition knowledge by assessing and measuring the development of children's understanding of the nutrition concepts that have been taught. As evaluators, educators at Muslimat NU Pamekasan Kindergarten regularly evaluate the extent to which children understand the material about healthy food, good eating habits and their application in everyday life. Evaluation is done through direct observation of children's behavior in activities involving food such as cooking together, gardening, or eating together. In addition, educators at Muslimat NU Pamekasan Kindergarten also use other techniques such as simple questions and answers or small group discussions to assess children's understanding. Thus, educators at Muslimat NU Pamekasan Kindergarten can find out whether the approach used is effective or needs to be adjusted. The results of this evaluation are not only used to determine children's level of achievement, but also as a basis for designing more appropriate learning activities to support the development of children's nutritional knowledge in the future. The evaluation also includes parents' involvement in supporting children's healthy diet at home.

Educators as evaluators are educators conducting assessments of students. The assessment is carried out to determine the level of effectiveness, success, and efficiency of the learning process, as an assessor, educators should continue to pay attention to student learning outcomes until optimal learning outcomes are achieved (Irjus, 2020) Student success in learning can be seen from the results of student learning evaluations. Educators can see and observe the achievement of their students in learning through their role as evaluators, which is why the role of educators as evaluators is very important and very necessary (Novianti, 2020).

1.2 Supporting and Hindering Factors of Educators' Role in Improving Nutrition Knowledge at Muslimat NU Kindergarten Pamekasan

1.2.1 Supporting factors

The main supporting factors in improving early childhood nutrition knowledge at Muslimat NU Pamekasan Kindergarten are educators who participate in technical training, such as accelerating the reduction of stunting, as well as the involvement of one of the educators at Muslimat NU Pamekasan Kindergarten as a posyandu cadre.

Participation in posyandu cadres provides educators with more in-depth knowledge about the importance of early childhood nutrition which is then applied in learning activities at school. In addition, educators at Muslimat NU Pamekasan Kindergarten also routinely conduct monthly child development analysis, such as measuring weight and height to determine nutritional needs in accordance with the child's growth and development stage. This approach allows educators at Muslimat NU Pamekasan Kindergarten to customize teaching materials according to children's physical and cognitive development. Another supporting factor is the collaboration between educators, parents, and external parties such as posyandu and puskesmas. This holistic approach helps create a shared awareness of the importance of a healthy diet. With these supporting factors, the role of educators in improving children's nutritional knowledge at Muslimat NU Pamekasan Kindergarten can run effectively.

The adequacy of children's nutritional needs will be reflected in their nutritional status. Inadequate fulfillment of children's nutritional needs that are not educative will affect the occurrence of malnutrition. Infection is one of the diseases that occur in children under five, where one of the causes of infection is the poor nutritional status of toddlers, which is directly influenced by the lack of maternal knowledge about nutritious food. Good nutritional adequacy in children will increase resistance to disease, children who experience malnutrition will be susceptible to disease, especially infectious diseases. The environment is a very important factor in human life, including in the mental development of children during their growth period. Toddlers are a group of children who are vulnerable to environmental influences (Supraptini, 2011).

1.2.2 The Inhibiting Factor

The main inhibiting factors in improving early childhood nutrition knowledge at Muslimat NU Pamekasan Kindergarten include the lack of awareness of parents about the importance of providing good nutrition to children. Many parents do not fully understand the role of healthy food in supporting children's growth and development so parents tend to give children less nutritious food both at home and at school. Family economic factors also play a role as some parents may prefer cheap, albeit unhealthy, food so that children's diets are not optimal. In addition, the presence of unhealthy snacks around the school environment is also an inhibiting factor. Children are often tempted to buy snacks that are high in sugar and fat which can affect their eating habits. Although educators at Muslimat NU Pamekasan Kindergarten try to introduce healthy eating patterns, this challenge remains due to the influence of the environment outside the school that does not support a healthy lifestyle. The habit of consuming instant food or unhealthy snacks at home is also an obstacle that is difficult to overcome without the involvement of parents who are more active in educating children about the importance of good nutrition.

Instant foods can provide convenience in preparation, but it is important to remember that overconsumption of these types of foods can result in negative impacts on children's health, including the risk of obesity and other health problems. Preschoolers may have difficulty eating if they consume too many snack foods such as ready-to-eat snacks and sweets (Yulianto, et al., 2022). Therefore, a balanced approach and providing tasty, healthy and nutritious food alternatives are essential in supporting an optimal diet for preschool-aged children. During school age, children need more nutrients for growth and activity. This is because during this period there is rapid physical, mental, intellectual and social growth, so this group needs special attention. The nutritional adequacy factor is determined by the adequacy of family food

consumption conditions, the amount and quality of family food is determined by the level of family income (Fadil, 2014).

CONCLUSION

The role of educators at Muslimat NU Pamekasan Kindergarten in improving early childhood nutrition knowledge is very effective. Educators act as facilitators, initiators, informers, directors and evaluators who actively develop nutrition learning through gardening activities, cooking together, and collaboration with posyandu. This success is supported by educator training and parent and community involvement. Educators are also involved in activities that introduce healthy and nutritious food ingredients to children. Nonetheless, there are challenges such as parents' lack of awareness of the importance of nutrition, economic limitations and the influence of unhealthy snacks around the school. Therefore, efforts to raise parents' awareness and create healthy eating habits from an early age are essential for nutrition education to be optimized and sustainable. Active involvement of parents in supporting healthy eating at home is also a key success factor.

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