



The Performance of Field School Instructors in Enhancing Farmers' Capacities (A Qualitative Study of Field Schools in Klaten Regency)

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to describe the role of Field School Facilitators (PSL), identify factors influencing their performance, and analyze strategies to increase farmer participation and understanding in Klaten Regency. The study employed a qualitative approach using a case study design. Data were collected through interviews, participatory observation, and documentation, and were then analyzed thematically based on Braun and Clarke's framework. The results indicate that FSLs perform their role as facilitators quite well through their mastery of subject matter, effective communication, and participatory methods. FSL performance is influenced by limited resources, heavy workloads, the size of the area under their supervision, differences in participants' understanding, and farmer attendance. Support in the form of training, mentoring, evaluation, facilities, and incentives is needed to enhance FSL professionalism and the effectiveness of the Field Schools.

INTRODUCTION

Agricultural development plays a crucial role in supporting Indonesia's food security and economic growth, but it still faces various challenges, such as low farmer productivity, climate change, land degradation, and limited access to technology, information, markets, and knowledge of sustainable agriculture. These conditions underscore the importance of building farmers' capacity through nonformal education, one example of which is the Field School (SL).

FS is a participatory learning approach that provides knowledge and skills through hands-on experience in the field. The success of Field Schools is heavily influenced by the role of Field School Guides (PSL) as learning facilitators. Klaten Regency is one of the regions actively implementing Field Schools, particularly in Integrated Pest Management; however, Klaten's rice productivity in 2023 remained the lowest in the former Surakarta Residency region, at 54.97 quintals/ha.

Therefore, it is necessary to improve the performance of Field School Guides so they can enhance farmers' capacity and productivity. This study explores the roles, challenges, and strategies of Field School Guides in improving the success of the Field School program in Klaten Regency.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Field Schools: Factors Affecting Performance, Learning Strategies, and Capacity Building for Farmers.

1. Field School Instructor (PSL) Performance

Performance refers to the results of an individual's work in carrying out their duties and responsibilities. PSL performance can be assessed based on the quality and quantity of work, timeliness, effectiveness, independence, and commitment. In practice, PSL performance is reflected in their ability to deliver course material, facilitate discussions, mentor farmers, and help resolve agricultural problems.

2. The Role of PSLs in Field Schools

PSLs serve as facilitators, motivators, mentors, technology mediators, problem solvers, and liaisons between farmers and the government. The approach emphasizes participatory learning, making farmers active participants in the learning process.

3. Factors Affecting PSL Performance

Internal factors include education, experience, motivation, and competence. External factors include infrastructure, government support, farmer characteristics, and workload.

4. PSL Learning Strategies

PSL strategies are implemented through field practice, demonstrations, discussions, interpersonal communication, and adapting methods to farmers' characteristics. These approaches aim to increase farmers' participation and understanding.

5. Farmer Capacity Building

Field Schools can enhance farmers' knowledge and skills in crop cultivation, pest control, fertilizer use, and the application of agricultural

technologies. Thus, the performance of the Field School Program (PSL) is a key factor in the success of Field Schools and in building farmers' capacity.

Summary: Field School performance is influenced by the interaction between individual competencies, participatory learning, farmer characteristics, and institutional support. Strengthening competencies and institutional support is necessary to improve the effectiveness of Field Schools in Klaten Regency.

The conceptual framework of this study is based on the implementation of Field Schools in Klaten Regency, with PSLs serving as the primary facilitators in the farmers' learning process. This qualitative study explores professional competencies, communication and facilitation skills, participatory learning methods, as well as factors that support and hinder PSL performance. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation, and were then analyzed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis. The research findings were used to understand the role of PSLs in enhancing farmers' knowledge, skills, adoption of innovations, and self-reliance, as well as to formulate strategies for the sustainable strengthening of the Field School program.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the performance of Field School Facilitators (PSL) in supporting capacity building among farmers in Klaten Regency. The study was conducted in Klaten Regency with 10 informants, consisting of Field School Facilitators, participating farmers, and relevant stakeholders. Informants were selected through purposive sampling based on their involvement and relevance to the implementation of the Field School program. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation. Data analysis utilized Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis, encompassing data familiarization, preliminary coding, theme identification, theme review, theme definition, and report preparation. Data validity was ensured through source triangulation, methodological triangulation, member checking, and audit trails to guarantee the credibility and reliability of the research findings.

RESEARCH RESULT

The research findings indicate that the performance of Field School Instructors (PSL) in Klaten Regency is generally quite good, but not yet optimal. PSLs are able to fulfill their role as facilitators through their mastery of agricultural subject matter, clear and understandable communication, and the use of participatory learning methods such as field practice, demonstrations, and group discussions. A friendly, open, and non-patronizing approach also encourages farmers to be more active in the learning process.

However, the performance of the PSLs still faces several challenges, including a dual workload, limited resources and time for mentoring, varying levels of farmer proficiency, and inconsistent participant attendance. On the other hand, Field School activities provide benefits in the form of improved farmer knowledge and skills, the application of agricultural technology, proper fertilizer use, pest control, and increased self-reliance in farming operations.

Therefore, ongoing training, mentoring, periodic evaluations, the provision of learning resources, the use of digital technology, and institutional support are needed to improve the performance of PSL and the effectiveness of the Field School program.

DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that the performance of School Field Facilitators (PSL) in Klaten Regency is generally good, although it is not yet optimal. The PSL plays an important role as a facilitator, motivator, and companion for farmers through technical competence, effective communication, and participatory learning methods. The use of simple language, field practices, demonstrations, and group discussions makes it easier for farmers to understand and apply the learning materials. These findings are consistent with the concept of participatory extension, which emphasizes the involvement of farmers as active participants in the learning process.

The study also found that PSL performance is influenced by both individual and organizational factors. Individual factors include technical competence, experience, motivation, communication skills, and facilitation skills. Meanwhile, organizational factors include the availability of facilities, workload, training opportunities, supervision, and institutional support. The main obstacles identified were limited facilities, limited mentoring time, multiple workloads, differences in farmers' understanding, and inconsistent participation.

The implementation of the School Field program contributes to improving farmers' knowledge and skills, particularly in cultivation practices, pest management, proper fertilizer application, and the use of organic and natural agricultural inputs. Therefore, strengthening the competence of PSL and providing continuous institutional support are important to improve the effectiveness and sustainability of the School Field program.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concludes that School Field Facilitators in Klaten Regency have generally performed their roles adequately as facilitators of farmer learning. Their performance is supported by technical competence, effective communication, participatory learning methods, and positive interpersonal relationships with farmers. However, their performance is still constrained by limited facilities, multiple workloads, limited mentoring time, and differences in farmer participation and understanding.

The study recommends that local agricultural institutions provide continuous training, mentoring, monitoring, and performance evaluation for PSL. Adequate learning facilities and digital media should also be provided to support the learning process. PSL are encouraged to continuously improve their technical and facilitation skills and use innovative and participatory learning methods. Farmers are also encouraged to actively participate and apply the knowledge gained from the School Field program in their farming activities.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

This study has several limitations. First, the research was conducted only in Klaten Regency, so the findings cannot be directly generalized to other regions with different agricultural and social conditions. Second, the qualitative approach focuses on understanding experiences and processes rather than statistically measuring causal relationships. Third, the number of informants was limited to farmers, PSL, and relevant stakeholders.

Further research is recommended to examine School Field programs in different regions and agricultural sectors. Future studies may also use quantitative or mixed-method approaches to measure the relationship between PSL performance and farmer productivity, income, technology adoption, and the sustainability of farming businesses. Research on the use of digital technology in agricultural extension is also recommended.

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