



Enhancing ABK Program through Sewing and Design Skills Training at SLB Kemala Bhayangkari 2 Gresik, East Java

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Article Info

Article history:

Received: December 20, 2025

Revised: April 20, 2026

Accepted: June 28, 2026

Keywords:

fashion design;
sewing training;
special schools;
students with special needs;
vocational education.

Abstract

In Indonesia, *Sekolah Luar Biasa* (SLB), or special schools, play an important role in preparing students with special needs for independent living through academic and vocational education. However, vocational fashion programs in many Indonesian SLBs remain constrained by limited practical facilities, inadequate equipment, and teachers' insufficient expertise in fashion design and garment production. This community service program aimed to strengthen teachers' instructional capacity and improve students' vocational life skills through sewing and fashion design training at SLB Kemala Bhayangkari 2 Gresik, East Java. The program adopted a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach consisting of problem identification, collaborative planning, action, and evaluation. Data were collected through interviews, observations, practical assessments, and Kirkpatrick's evaluation model. The intervention included the provision of sewing technologies, training in machine operation and maintenance, color and pattern matching, sewing techniques, digital fashion design, and intensive mentoring in producing innovative fashion products. The program enhanced teachers' knowledge and practical competencies in fashion instruction while enabling students to progressively develop sewing and design skills through authentic production activities. Participants successfully produced a variety of fashion products, demonstrated improved technical competencies, and showed high enthusiasm and confidence throughout the training. These findings indicate that participatory vocational training combined with teacher capacity building provides an effective approach to strengthening vocational education for students with special needs and offers a practical model for improving employability-oriented learning in special schools.

To cite this article: Mustikasari, H., Zahro, S., Sagirani, T., Cintya, H. A. B., Nugraha, N., Go, F. Z. F., Natasha, V., Pratama, R. H., & Reza, C. I. A. P. (2026). Enhancing ABK Program through Sewing and Design Skills Training at SLB Kemala Bhayangkari 2 Gresik, East Java. *Smart Society: Community Service and Empowerment Journal*, 6(2), 371-384. <https://doi.org/10.58524/smartsociety.v6i2.922>

INTRODUCTION

Children with special needs (*Anak Berkebutuhan Khusus/ABK*) in Indonesia greatly benefit from acquiring vocational and life skills that support their future independence and social participation (Chang et al., 2025; Jusmirad et al., 2023; Mahmudah et al., 2023; Octaviani et al.,

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2024). Equipping ABK with skills that match their interests and abilities not only promotes independent living but also reduces long-term dependence on others (Jannah & Wardana, 2025; Kim & Lee, 2024; Nijhof et al., 2024). As inclusive educational institutions, Special Schools (Sekolah Luar Biasa/SLB) provide supportive learning environments where students develop academic competencies alongside their interests and talents through curricular and extracurricular activities (Castellary-López et al., 2023; Sekhri, 2019; Yıldız, 2022). In addition, SLB implements vocational education programs to prepare students for employment after graduation by equipping them with practical skills relevant to the labour market (Bennett, 2013; Lee et al., 2023; Tomblin & Haring, 1999). These vocational programs play an essential role in improving the employability and quality of life of ABK graduates (Mahmudah et al., 2023; Venkatesh et al., 2023; Yusof et al., 2014).

SLB Kemala Bhayangkari 2 Gresik is one of the special schools providing vocational education across multiple educational levels, including kindergarten, elementary school, junior high school (SMPLB), and senior high school, serving students with intellectual disabilities, hearing impairments, and visual impairments. The school offers vocational training in fashion design, culinary arts, cosmetology, screen printing, batik making, and cleaning services as part of its efforts to prepare students for independent living and future employment (Ardiani & Youenanto, 2024). The vocational curriculum is implemented progressively through four stages: the understanding stage for Grades 1–6, the introduction stage for Grades 7–9, the career selection stage for Grades 10–11, and the career confirmation stage for Grade 12. This structured approach reflects the school's commitment to developing students' vocational competencies according to their educational level and readiness.

Although vocational education plays a strategic role in fostering the independence of children with special needs (Anak Berkebutuhan Khusus/ABK), its implementation in many special schools continues to face several challenges, including inadequate practical facilities and infrastructure, limited learning resources, and insufficient teacher competence in delivering industry-oriented vocational education (Perdana et al., 2024). Furthermore, effective instruction for students with special needs requires appropriate teaching strategies, including the use of suitable instructional media and learning methods that accommodate students' characteristics and facilitate the acquisition of vocational skills (Amelia & Azizah, 2023). Basuni et al. (2025) further reported that vocational education in special schools is constrained by a shortage of professionally qualified vocational teachers, inadequate supporting facilities and infrastructure, teachers' workload, and the reluctance of some students to participate in learning activities. These limitations may reduce the effectiveness of vocational education in equipping students with the competencies required for employment and independent living. Similar conditions were identified at SLB Kemala Bhayangkari 2 Gresik based on interviews and field observations conducted by the community service team.

The findings revealed that the fashion design program, a compulsory subject for Grades 7–12 students with mild intellectual disabilities and hearing impairments, faced several constraints. The school's fashion laboratory contained only five sewing machines and one embroidery machine, which were insufficient to accommodate the number of students participating in practical sessions. In addition, essential supporting equipment, such as buttonhole machines, cutting tables, and specialty sewing machines, was unavailable. Another challenge concerned the limited academic background of the teacher responsible for fashion instruction, resulting in less optimal sewing techniques, monotonous product designs, inappropriate colour combinations, and outdated fashion styles. These limitations reduced students' opportunities to develop industry-relevant competencies and restricted their access to internship opportunities in the fashion sector, thereby affecting their future employability (Istikamah & Purwanta, 2021; Aprilia et al., 2025; Zahro et al., 2025).

The conditions identified at SLB Kemala Bhayangkari 2 Gresik contrast with the considerable potential of the local fashion industry. According to the Gresik Regency Central Bureau of Statistics, the regency is home to 205 fashion-related industries, indicating substantial employment opportunities for graduates possessing relevant vocational competencies. This discrepancy highlights the need to strengthen vocational education by improving both instructional capacity and practical learning experiences. Unlike conventional vocational activities that primarily emphasize student practice, this community service program integrates teacher capacity building with intensive sewing and fashion design training for students using a Participatory Action

Research (PAR) approach. Accordingly, this program aims to enhance the life skills of students at SLB Kemala Bhayangkari 2 Gresik through sewing and fashion design training while strengthening teachers' competencies in vocational instruction. The program is expected to improve students' creativity, employability, and readiness to participate in the local fashion industry, while providing a practical model for strengthening vocational education in special schools.

METHOD

Based on the aforementioned problems, this public service program will adopt the PAR (Participatory Action Research) method to achieve its objectives (Baum et al., 2006). The PAR method is a research method that involves all participants (McGrath et al., 2025), in this case, all parties involved in the fashion program in SLB Kemala Bhayangkari 2 Gresik, who are encountering technical problems in every single stage of the program implementation. The stages of the PAR method adopted in this program are illustrated in Figure 1.

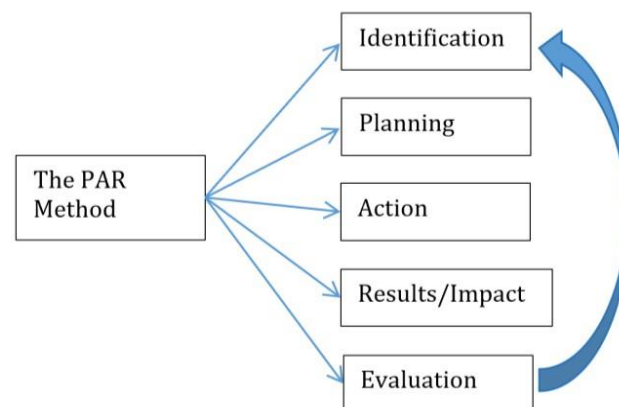


Figure 1. The Stages of the PAR Method
Source: Adapted from Baum et al. (2006)

Figure 1 shows that every single stage of the program involved parties from SLB Kemala Bhayangkari 2 Gresik. The first stage of problem identification began with unstructured interviews to collect data on the problems facing the vocational programs, especially the vocational program of fashion design. Following the stage of problem identification was the stage of planning, at which the project team, in collaboration with all parties involved, decided on which problem they had to place a high priority. The third stage was to put the plans into action with a shared commitment. The next stage was a stage at which all parties enjoyed the impact of the implementation of the public service program on the SLB and all its stakeholders. The final stage was the stage of evaluation, at which all activities performed during the implementation of the plans were assessed to determine whether or not they were effective in solving the problems. The evaluation stage involved the adoption of Kirkpatrick's model of evaluation, only that the evaluation of this program focused merely on the levels of reaction and learning.

For the purpose of collecting comprehensive data at every single stage of the program, the team conducted interviews and observations to know whether or not the public service program was successful and brought about noticeable impacts on the SLB and its stakeholders. The interview and observation guidelines used for data collection are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Guidelines for interviews and observations

Purpose	Focus	Indicators	Interview Questions	Observation
To enhance SLB students' life skills through the training program of sewing and design skills to foster SLB students' creativity and competitiveness in the job market	Fashion products created by SLB students	Productivity of SLB students	1. What facilities do SLB students use during the learning process?	Direct observation of the learning facilities used in the fashion vocational program, including the availability and condition of sewing equipment and students' learning environment.
			2. How is the learning process implemented in the fashion vocational program?	
			3. What products have SLB students produced so far? Please explain.	
			4. What kind of improvement program is desired?	
			5. What are the desired outcomes for the SLB?	
	Social community	Knowledge and understanding of students and teachers about fashion	1. What sewing techniques have SLB students adopted to create fashion works?	Observation of students' fashion products and learning activities to assess teachers' understanding and implementation of fashion concepts during instruction.
			2. How are materials and fabric scraps utilized in students' fashion products?	
			3. Before practicing sewing, have SLB students been taught to design a fashion product?	
			4. What are the expectations regarding fashion knowledge?	

Table 1 shows highlights the public service program's focus on two aspects of the vocational program of fashion design at SLB Kemala Bhayangkari 2 Gresik, namely the productivity of SLB students and their social community. These two aspects were the focal points in which the problems that the public service program tried to solve lay. Productivity encompasses various aspects of SLB students' learning process, including facilities of the SLB and products they can produce, while the social community is the aspect related to knowledge and understanding of both SLB students and teachers about fashion studies.

A coding system was employed to distinguish between data collected from interviews and observations, streamlining the analysis process. The code INT was used for the data from interviews, and the code OBV was used for data from observation. Additionally, the code TCH was used for teachers and the code STD was used for students. Given that there were five students involved as program participants, the code for students was divided to STD_1 to STD_5. Similarly, the codes TCH_1 to TCH_3 represented three teachers involved in this program. In this way, the data code INT_TCH_2_07072025 used in the data analysis process can be understood as the data collected through an interview with teacher 2 conducted on July 7, 2025.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Indentification

The process of problem identification was conducted by interviews and observation. The interview sessions involved five students and three teachers of the vocational program of fashion design. The results of the interviews with students are recorded as follows.

"The duration of sewing practices is short because of limited number of sewing machines available in the laboratory, which forced students to take turns in using the machines. Moreover, the machines sometimes cannot work well, and sometimes, they are inoperable. Furthermore, the unavailability of cutting machines causes students to cut materials on the floor. These improper working conditions lead to students' back pain and uneven, untidy cuts of materials. Hopefully, the laboratory will be

equipped with sewing machines equal in number to the students" (STD_1, STD_2, STD_3, STD_4, and STD_5). The results of the interviews with the teachers is described as follows.

"The learning process at this school faces the problems of insufficient laboratory facilities. The number of sewing machines is disproportionate, the machine condition does not suit the characteristics of SLB students, and the workspace condition is inadequate. Additionally, not having graduated from any fashion school or academy, the teachers lack a comprehensive understanding and in-depth knowledge of fashion studies. As a result, the products created during the learning process are limited only to headscarves and aprons because the teachers are not confident enough to teach other sewing techniques, leading to limited variants of products. What is more, in drawing new ideas for product designs, those teachers rely on information from their fellow teachers. They have a narrow scope of excellent reference sources. They have not even accessed popular design idea platforms like Pinterest" (TCH_1, TCH_2, and TCH_3).

The observation captured the same fact regarding the condition of laboratory facilities and the implementation of the vocational program of fashion design at SLB Kemala Bhayangkari 2 Gresik (see Figure 2).



Figure 2. The Laboratory of the vocational program of fashion design at SLB Kemala Bhayangkari 2

Based on the results of interviews and observation, it is known that the problems facing SLB Kemala Bhayangkari 2 of Gresik Regency lie in inadequate production facilities and limited fashion skills among teachers and students. These findings align with previous research (Allam & Martin, 2021; Fujino et al., 2024; Myrie et al., 2024).

Plan

The results of the interviews and observation were then analyzed and discussed collaboratively in a Focus Discussion Group (FGD) which involved the project team and stakeholders of SLB Kemala Bhayangkari 2 of Gresik Regency. The FGD produced some plans to overcome the identified problems: the problems related to insufficient production facilities will be solved by the procurement of technologies tailored to the needs and unique characteristics of SLB students, while the problems of limited fashion skills among teachers and students will be overcome by conducting the training and mentoring programs focusing on the creation of simple and innovative fashion products by students and teachers of the SLB. The plans are outlined in Table 2.

Table 2. Priority problems and solutions

Aspects	Problems	Solutions
Production	1. The laboratory has only 5 sewing machines, which are insufficient for the number of students.	1. Adding sewing machines to the fashion design vocational program
	2. The outdated sewing machines require frequent maintenance.	2. Improving knowledge about sewing machine maintenance
	3. The laboratory lacks machines for variation stitching.	3. Procuring support technologies for the fashion design vocational program (Specialized tools for button-making and interfacing, and embroidery machines)
	4. The laboratory lacks cutting tables.	
Social	1. The usually applied sewing techniques	1. Enhancing SLB students' sewing

Community	resulted in products with subpar stitch quality.	skills
	2. Fashion products created by SLB students had limited design variation.	2. Diversifying ABK's designs
	1. 3.The combination of materials and colors does not match	3. Mastering materials and color coordination for ABK
	2. The product design created by ABK doesn't follow current trends.	4. Developing trendy design skills for ABK's products
	3. 5. The instructors teaching fashion didn't have a background in fashion studies.	

Action

The third stage of the PAR method is to put the plans into action. Based on the plans collaboratively agreed on (Table 2), the procurement of technologies was obviously the first practically effective solution to the problem facing the fashion design vocational program (Istiarsyah et al., 2025). The second solution was to conduct training focusing on sharing new insights into fashion design, sewing, and design skills training (Anggraeni et al., 2023), and a mentoring program for innovative product creation (Stumbo et al., 2010; Williams et al., 2024). This action stage comprised a series of activities designed to address the identified needs, as described in the subsequent paragraphs.

Technology and its utilization

Based on the problem identified through interviews and observation, the technologies procured for the program included high-speed sewing machines, overlock machines, buttonhole machines, decorative sewing machines, button-making tools, and cutting tables. The technologies were procured because the existing sewing machines in the SLB's sewing laboratory were insufficient. With the procurement of these technologies, SLB students have no longer to fight over the machines or take turns using them, increasing the effectiveness of students' learning sewing skills. Moreover, the procurement of the technologies was also complemented by training sessions on the techniques to operate the technologies and to maintain them. Figure 3 illustrates the sewing machines procured to support the implementation of the vocational program at the special school (SLB).



Figure 3. Sewing machines for supporting the SLB program

Training on color and pattern mix-and-match

Training on color and pattern mix-and-match was conducted as an effort to enhance knowledge and understanding of students and teachers of the SLB. This training gave SLB students and teachers a practical example of colors and patterns often used in the fashion world. The results of interviews and observation are described as follows.

"Training on color and pattern mix-and-match helped SLB students and teachers realize that colors and patterns are crucial factors which attract potential buyers' attention. Taking this into consideration, they realized that the dull coloration and monotonous patterns they often used were what made their products lose out in the market (STD_1, TCH_1, and TCH_3). After the training, SLB students felt that their fashion products had uninspiring patterns and were somber in color (TCH_2, STD_2, STD_3, and STD_5)."

It was also known through observation that students and teachers of the SLB began to realize that colors and patterns are decisive factors of behind the success of a product. This is evident in the results of the sewing and design training provided for students with special needs. Figure 4 presents the training session on color and pattern mix-and-match.



Figure 4. Training on color and pattern mix-and-match

Sewing training

The sewing training was provided in three phases: Basic sewing training, training on creating simple products, and training on creating innovative products. The explanation is as follows.

The first phase is basic sewing training. Sewing training was undoubtedly one of the realistic solutions to the problems facing the fashion design vocational program at SLB Kemala Bhayangkari 2 of Gresik regency. The training began with machine maintenance and basic sewing skills training. The machine maintenance training is highly necessary to equip SLB students and teachers with recommended maintenance procedures in case of machine malfunction, which is rarely addressed by both students and teachers. In addition to assessing the skill levels of students, the basic sewing skills training was provided to improve students' skills in performing maintenance work while operating the currently-procured technologies.

The sewing machine maintenance training covered machine demonstration, explanation of its functions, hands-on instruction for SLB students and teachers on cleaning the machine and lubricating it. With such training, students and teachers were able not only to operate the machine but to perform minor repairs in case of minor mechanical breakdown. In fact, these machines need to be periodically serviced to ensure their durability and prevent complete breakdown.

Subsequently, the basic sewing training began with assigning students to practice straight stitching on patchwork fabric to allow them to adapt to the new technologies. Calico cloth was distributed to every single student beforehand. During the training, accompanied by their teachers, the public service program team provided SLB students with technical instructions on how to thread the machine, spool the bobbin, insert the bobbin case, and turn on the machine. In this training, students were also taught how to remove and install needles on the sewing machine to ensure proper needle direction. Once the machines were ready, students began practicing straight stitching using the fabric distributed earlier. This process persisted until those students felt comfortable with the machine.

To assess whether SLB students and teachers know very well how to operate the machine, students were assigned to remove threads and needles and then install them to the point at which the machine was ready to be operated. The test was conducted several times because some students forgot the procedures, and some others failed to install the threads in the proper direction.

During this basic sewing training, students were assigned to create sewing machine covers. The assignment was given in order to assess whether or not students passed the tests and to keep the machine clean. Figure 5 illustrates the basic sewing training conducted during the program.



Figure 5. The basic sewing training

The second phase is training on creating simple products. Sewing skills training was continued to the next phase, in which students were taught to create simple products in the form of household linens, like tablecloths and chair cushion covers. The purpose of the sewing training in this phase was to enhance students' sewing skills and to apply the theory of color and pattern mix-and-match from the previous training to a real product. The products produced during the practical training are presented in Figure 6.



Figure 6. The products created during training on creating a simple product

The last phase is training on creating creative products. The phase of sewing skills training focused on teaching SLB students to create fashion products with simple designs. They were assigned to create simple dresses, skirts, and blouses. Prior to this phase, participants were divided into three groups, each of which consisted of students, teachers, and a member of public service program team. To give the groups an insight into what to do in this phase, the designs and detailed parts of the product expected to be replicated were shown. Afterwards, all groups processed the materials into finished products. In the final phase of the sewing skills training, students learned that all parts of the product the importance of ironing and finishing processes to ensure that the finished products looked tidy and elegant.

In this final phase, students did not take a sewing test, but their products were assessed and evaluated instead. This aimed to let those students be aware of the shortcomings of their products so as to do better in their future production processes. For this purpose, the students were also taught about product quality control to ensure that they could create high-quality products. The training session on developing innovative products is presented in Figure 7.



Figure 7. Training on creating innovative products

Design skills training

Another training provided for both SLB students and teachers was the design skills training. This training was also provided in three phases: basic design training, advanced design training, and training on creating innovative product designs. The explanation is as follows.

The first phase is basic design training. This phase of the design training was aimed at assessing students' basic design skills. In this training, students were given paper and paint. They were asked to create color blends and apply them to the provided paper. The products created in this training were students' paintings on unspecified themes. Figure 8 presents the products resulting from the basic design training.



Figure 8. The products in basic design training

The second is advanced design training. This training involved using digital designs tailored to each student's characteristics and capabilities based on the results of previous interviews. Those students have actually made a design by using digital designs, but not in a regular way. They often did so only when preparing to enroll in a competition. Digital design skills are needed on many occasions. Therefore, this training was expected to enhance students' knowledge and skills so that they would be highly prepared for jobs in the future.

This phase of design training resulted in some batik patterns that would be used in the next phase of creating innovative products. The batik patterns created by students of SLB Kemala Bhayangkari 2 of Gresik Regency are illustrated in Figure 9.

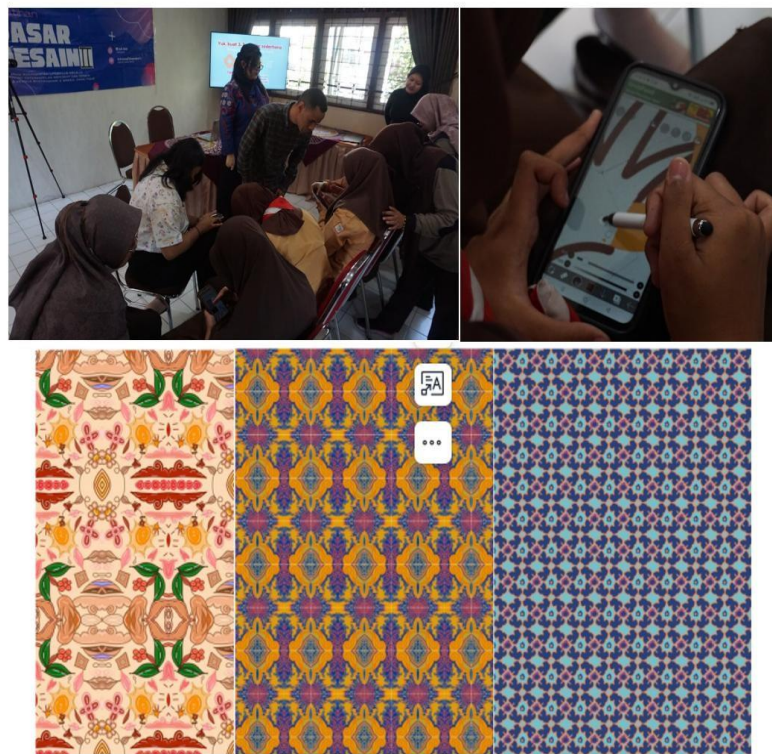


Figure 9. The result of the advanced design training

The last phase is training on creating innovative product designs. The training utilized a particular application taught before. In order to stimulate SLB students to express their ideas in a pattern design, the public service program team encouraged students to incorporate their own concepts into the patterns designed. This training was conducted to prepare students for a batik design competition, equipping them with the skills and confidence to participate in the competition. The innovative product designs created by the students are presented in Figure 10.



Figure 10. Innovative product designs created by students of SLB Kemala Bhayangkari 2 of Gresik Regency

Results

The collaborative program between the community service team and the students and teachers of SLB Kemala Bhayangkari 2 Gresik Regency contributed to the improvement of fashion-related skills, as reflected in the fashion products created throughout the training activities. During the program, participants progressively developed their competencies by producing fashion products ranging from simple designs to more innovative creations. As a follow-up, periodic mentoring will be conducted to support the sustainability of the vocational program at SLB Kemala Bhayangkari 2 Gresik Regency.

One of the notable outcomes of the training was the students' high level of interest and enthusiasm throughout the learning activities. The students actively participated in every stage of the training and expressed their willingness to continue producing fashion products after completing the program. This finding is in line with [Loc et al. \(2025\)](#), who emphasized the importance of training experiences in preparing learners for future employment. Likewise, [Bicho et al. \(2024\)](#) highlighted the importance of developing fashion-related skills through practical learning experiences that connect academic learning with industrial practice. In the present program, students were directly involved in every stage of the fashion production process, enabling them to gradually develop their sewing and fashion design skills through hands-on practice.

The findings of this program are also consistent with [Ampera et al. \(2023\)](#), who emphasized that vocational learning in the fashion field becomes more meaningful when students participate directly in authentic production activities that integrate technical competencies with practical experience. Although the present program was implemented as a community service initiative rather than a formal Teaching Factory program, both approaches provide opportunities for learners to strengthen vocational competencies through real production activities. In addition, the present findings are in line with [Aprilia et al. \(2025\)](#), who discussed the importance of strengthening vocational education in special schools to better prepare students with disabilities for future employment. Similarly, the practical training implemented in this program provided students with opportunities to improve their vocational skills while gaining learning experiences that are relevant to workplace contexts.

Evaluation

The evaluation process was conducted in every single stage of the program. The evaluation was given in two methods: giving a practice test and conducting a product evaluation. The practice

tests given included a sewing test, a test on inserting threads into the sewing machine, a test on machine operation procedures, from wearing shoes and threading the machine to the point at which the machine is ready to be used. Another practice test was to create a simple product and process it into a finished product. Meanwhile, a product evaluation was made through identifying and assessing a fashion product created by SLB students. For example, the public service program team would ask a student to share their opinion about the quality of their own products. During the process, they might see that a part of their product was good in quality, but some others were poor. This method of evaluation will make the students get used to assessing their own products and correcting their shortcomings. The feedback on the product quality was received not only from the team but also from the product creators. In this way, two-way communication was established, encouraging students to express their feelings.

The evaluation was also conducted to measure the effectiveness of the program in helping the SLB students and teachers enhance their fashion skills. The evaluation of this program was made by adopting Kirkpatrick's model of evaluation to know the reactions of students and teachers after the training implementation. the result of observation on students' reactions is described as follows.

After training, the public service program team, with the help of SLB teachers, asked SLB students about their opinion and impression of the training implementation. it was observable that every time they finished creating a product, those students felt happy and eager to showcase their creation to their parents after school. Moreover, they often told the public service program team that they were highly enthusiastic about creating more fashion products (Ogoe, 2025).

CONCLUSION

Community service program for creative students with special needs: A life skills development initiative through sewing and design training at SLB Kemala Bhayangkari 2 Gresik, East Java, showcases significant impact from the identification to evaluation stages. This great achievement stems from the active involvement of stakeholders of the SLB in every stage of the program and their shared commitment to solving their problems by implementing the plans collaboratively agreed upon in FGD. The procurement of technologies and the implementation of a series of training and mentoring programs have made a profound impact on the enhanced fashion skills of the students and teachers. Despite the success of the program, there is more room for improvement in the fashion design vocational program at the SLB. Therefore, the enhancement of students' knowledge and skills should be followed by a continuous mentoring program, which needs a comprehensive, massive support from all the related parties. The continuous effort will undoubtedly foster the employability of graduates of SLB Kemala Bhayangkari 2 of Gresik Regency. Skills cannot be built overnight, let alone training employees with disabilities in skills.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We would like to extend our sincere gratitude to the Directorate of Research and Community Service (DPPM), Ministry of Higher Education, Science, and Technology, for awarding us a grant for Fiscal Year 2025 under the Community Service Program, specifically through the Community Service Partnership Empowerment Scheme (PKM). Special thanks also go to the Research and Community Service Institute (LPPM) of Surabaya University, which has provided guidance and motivation for the Community Service program carried out by the team. Gratitude is also extended to SLB Kemala Bhayangkari 2 of Gresik Regency, involved in this program.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

H.M. conceptualized the community service program, supervised the project, secured funding, and led the manuscript preparation. S.Z. contributed to methodology development, coordinated the implementation of the training activities, collected and analyzed the data, and drafted the manuscript. T.S. contributed to the program design, data interpretation, and critical revision of the manuscript. H.A.B.C., N.N., F.Z.F.G., V.N., R.H.P., and C.I.A.P.R. participated in the

implementation of the training and mentoring activities, data collection, documentation, and preparation of the program outputs.

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