

CREATIVE INNOVATIONS TO IMPROVE SKILLS AND EMPOWERING DISABLED COMMUNITIES

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Abstrak

Penyandang disabilitas, khususnya mereka yang memiliki keterbatasan mental, terus menghadapi hambatan dalam memperoleh pekerjaan dan kemandirian ekonomi. Pelatihan berbasis komunitas digunakan sebagai pendekatan strategis untuk mengatasi tantangan ini. Program ini bertujuan untuk mengevaluasi efektivitas program pelatihan berbasis komunitas yang inovatif dan berkelanjutan dalam meningkatkan keterampilan, pengetahuan, psikososial, dan kemandirian ekonomi di antara individu penyandang disabilitas. Pendekatan partisipatif berbasis komunitas ini diterapkan dengan melibatkan 30 peserta, yaitu anak-anak penyandang disabilitas beserta orang tua mereka, dari ABeKa Mom's Craft, komunitas penyandang disabilitas di Malang, Jawa Timur, Indonesia. Peserta menerima pelatihan praktis dalam batik ciprat, teknik shibori, produksi tas jinjing, produksi sabun cair dan sabun padat alami, kewirausahaan dasar, dan teknik pemasaran. Fase pendampingan selama tiga bulan dilakukan untuk memastikan retensi keterampilan dan keberlanjutan proses produksi. Hasil dari program ini dinilai menggunakan analisis kualitatif dan analisis kuantitatif melalui desain pra-uji dan pasca-uji. Perbedaan skor pengetahuan dianalisis menggunakan uji t berpasangan. Peserta menunjukkan peningkatan substansial dalam keterampilan teknis dan kewirausahaan, dibuktikan dengan kemampuan memproduksi sekitar 500 tas jinjing yang dapat dipasarkan. Perkembangan dari segi psikososial meliputi peningkatan kepercayaan diri, motivasi, dan partisipasi anak-anak penyandang disabilitas beserta orang tua mereka. Dampak ekonomi awal diamati melalui pembentukan kelompok produksi skala kecil, partisipasi dalam pameran, dan kolaborasi dengan pemangku kepentingan industri kreatif lokal. Skor pengetahuan rata-rata meningkat secara signifikan dari $52,5 \pm 18,9$ (pra-uji) menjadi $97,5 \pm 6,9$ (pasca-uji) ($p < 0,001$), dengan ukuran efek yang sangat besar (Cohen's $d = 2,57$).

Kata kunci: disabilitas; komunitas penyandang disabilitas; keterampilan; pelatihan; pemberdayaan masyarakat.

Abstract

Individuals with disabilities, particularly those with mental limitations, face persistent barriers to employment and economic independence. Community-based training has emerged as a strategic approach to address these challenges. This program aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of an innovative, continuous community-based training program in improving skills, knowledge, psychosocial outcomes, and economic independence among individuals with disabilities. A community-based participatory approach was applied involving 30 participants from parents and children with disabilities from the ABeKa Mom's Craft, Disabled Community in Malang, East Java, Indonesia. Participants received practical training in batik ciprat, shibori techniques, tote bag production, production of natural liquid soap and solid soap, basic entrepreneurship and marketing techniques. A three-month mentoring phase was conducted to ensure skill retention and production continuity. Program outcomes were assessed using both qualitative measures and quantitative analysis through a pre-test and post-test design. Differences in knowledge scores were analysed using a paired t-test. Participants demonstrated substantial improvement in technical and entrepreneurial skills, evidenced by the production of approximately 500 marketable tote bags. Psychosocial outcomes included increased self-confidence, motivation, and social participation by children with disabilities and their parents. Early economic impacts were observed through the establishment of a small-scale production group, participation in exhibitions, and collaboration with local creative industry stakeholders. The mean knowledge score increased significantly from 52.5 ± 18.9 (pre-test) to 97.5 ± 6.9 (post-test) ($p < 0.001$), with a very large effect size (Cohen's $d = 2.57$).

Keywords: disability; disabled community; skills; training; community empowerment.



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1. INTRODUCTION

Persons with disabilities continue to experience structural barriers in education, employment, and social participation. These barriers are often exacerbated by stigma, limited access to resources, and inadequate inclusive policies, which collectively hinder their full participation in society (Suarez-Balcazar et al., 2023). Individuals with disabilities face even greater challenges due to cognitive limitations and behavioral issues, which reduce their competitiveness in the labor market (An et al., 2026).

People with mental disabilities may experience barriers to education, employment, and social participation that vary according to the nature and severity of their mental health conditions and the availability of appropriate support. Mental disabilities encompass a broad range of mental disorders and psychosocial disabilities and may be associated with difficulties in emotional regulation, cognition, behavior, and social functioning (World Health Organization, 2025). These functional challenges, together with stigma, discrimination, and limited access to inclusive services and employment opportunities, may further restrict the participation of people with mental disabilities in education, vocational training, and the labour market (World Health Organization, 2024; Reed, 2024). Such behavior makes it more difficult for people with disabilities who have graduated from high school or its equivalent to continue their education or find suitable employment, leading to many people with mental disabilities being unproductive and unemployed. Individuals with disabilities often face difficulties in accessing economic opportunities and appropriate job skills, putting them at risk of dependence and lack of independence after graduating from high school or equivalent.

Recent global evidence highlights that persons with disabilities continue to experience disproportionately low labor force participation and limited access to decent work opportunities, particularly in low- and middle-income countries. In Indonesia, the employment participation of persons with disabilities remains significantly lower than the general population, with structural barriers such as limited access to training, education, and inclusive labor policies contributing to this disparity. Training interventions have been identified as a critical factor in improving employment outcomes, particularly when integrated with inclusive labor market policies and social support systems. Furthermore, community-based and person-centered vocational training approaches have been shown to enhance not only technical skills but also soft skills such as confidence, social capital, and job readiness, which are essential predictors of long-term employment success among individuals with disabilities (Endawansa & Setyonaluri, 2025).

Previous studies have shown that vocational training plays a crucial role in improving economic empowerment among individuals with disabilities. Skill-based training not only enhances technical capacity but also increases confidence and social participation. Furthermore, structured training programs have been shown to significantly improve employment outcomes and income levels among persons with disabilities (Greenwood et al., 2023). From a theoretical perspective, disability should not be viewed solely through the medical model, which emphasizes individual impairments, but rather through the social and rights-based models that recognize environmental, social, and policy-related barriers as key determinants of disability-related disadvantage. The social model of disability argues that exclusion is primarily driven by inaccessible systems, discrimination, and lack of inclusive opportunities rather than the impairment itself (Shakespeare et al., 2018). This perspective is particularly relevant in low- and middle-income countries, where structural inequalities and limited institutional support exacerbate the marginalization of persons with disabilities (Shakespeare et al., 2018).

In Indonesia, community-based empowerment programs have become a strategic approach to address these challenges. Such programs aim to improve skills, increase productivity, and foster independence among vulnerable groups. However, many initiatives remain short-term and lack sustainability, limiting their long-term impact. In this context, community-based empowerment programs play a critical role in bridging the gap between individual capacity and structural opportunity. Such programs not only provide skill-based training but also create enabling

environments where participants can engage socially, build networks, and access economic opportunities. Recent studies emphasize that empowerment is a multidimensional construct encompassing psychological empowerment (self-efficacy), social empowerment (participation), and economic empowerment (income generation), all of which are essential for long-term independence (Suarez-Balcazar et al., 2023).

Furthermore, integrating creative industries such as batik production and textile crafts into empowerment programs represents a culturally relevant and sustainable approach, particularly in Indonesia. The creative economy sector allows flexible work arrangements and accommodates diverse abilities, making it a suitable pathway for inclusive employment (Renko et al., 2016). This study contributes not only to disability empowerment literature but also to inclusive economic development strategies.

Therefore, there is a need for innovative and continuous training programs that are tailored to the abilities of individuals with mental disabilities. Craft-based training, such as batik and textile production, offers a practical and inclusive approach, as it allows flexibility, creativity, and commercialization potential. Moreover, integrating entrepreneurship training can further enhance participants' ability to generate income independently. This study aims to evaluate the implementation of a community-based continuous training program to improve skills, self-confidence, and economic independence among individuals with mental disabilities in Malang, Indonesia.

2. METHOD

Skills tailored to the unique characteristics and limitations of people with disabilities are needed to empower them. Innovative and sustainable training is the solution to this problem. Training tailored to the specific characteristics of people with mental disabilities, delivered sustainably and innovatively, will be provided to the disability community, complemented by the development of business skills and entrepreneurial principles. This study employed a community-based participatory approach, which emphasizes active involvement of participants throughout the program.

To ensure the rigor of the intervention, the training program was designed based on experiential learning theory, which emphasizes learning through direct practice and repetition. This approach has been shown to be particularly effective for individuals with disabilities, as it accommodates different learning capacities and promotes skill retention (Mudde et al., 2026).

In addition, the mentoring phase was structured to provide continuous feedback and reinforcement, which are critical in sustaining behavioral change and improving long-term outcomes. Continuous mentoring has been identified as a key success factor in community-based empowerment programs, particularly in vulnerable populations (Greenwood et al., 2023).

a. Study Setting and Participants

The program was conducted in Malang City and involved 30 participants from parents and children with disabilities from the ABeKa Mom's Craft, Disabled Community in Malang, East Java, Indonesia.

b. Program Design

The intervention was carried out in several stages:

1) Preparation Phase

The identification of participants' needs and initial conditions was carried out through direct observation and informal group interviews with 20 parents of children with disabilities prior to the start of the training activities. These group interviews were conducted directly by the community service team to gather information on participants'

interests, existing skill levels, potential challenges, and their expectations regarding the training and future economic activities.

The information obtained from the group interviews and direct observations was descriptively analyzed by the community service team. Various identified aspects, such as needs, existing skills, interests, challenges, and expectations, were considered alongside observed baseline capacities to determine the most suitable types of training activities for the participants. Based on this needs assessment, the training program encompassed ciprat batik and shibori techniques, tote bag production, the manufacture of natural liquid and solid soaps, entrepreneurship, and marketing. Subsequently, the participants' prior knowledge of the skills to be taught was assessed using a pre-test before training commenced.

2) Socialization Phase

Introduction of the program objectives, activities, and expected outcomes to participants.

3) Training Phase

Participants received hands-on training in:

- a) Batik ciprat (splash batik) technique
- b) Shibori fabric dyeing technique
- c) Production of tote bags using the fabrics
- d) Production of natural liquid soap and solid soap
- e) Basic entrepreneurship and marketing strategies

4) Mentoring Phase

Participants were assisted for approximately three months to support production consistency and product marketing.

5) Evaluation Phase

Program outcomes were assessed using a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches. Skill acquisition and psychosocial changes were assessed qualitatively through direct observation during the training and mentoring activities. Observations were conducted by members of the community service team and training facilitators throughout the practical sessions. Skill acquisition was assessed descriptively based on participants' observed ability to follow the demonstrations and instructions and to participate in the production process for batik ciprat, shibori, tote bags, and natural liquid and solid soap. No standardized skill assessment instrument, scoring scale, or formal rubric was used; therefore, these observations were not converted into numerical scores.

Psychosocial changes were also documented descriptively based on observable participant engagement and participation during the training and mentoring sessions. These observations were used to provide qualitative descriptions of participants' responses and engagement during the activities rather than to establish quantitatively measured psychosocial outcomes. Production output was assessed by documenting the number and types of products produced during the program. Approximately 500 products were produced during the training and mentoring period.

In addition, participants' knowledge was measured using a structured pre-test and post-test questionnaire administered before and after the intervention. The participants asked to complete the pre-test and post-test questionnaires were exclusively parents of

children with disabilities, totaling 20 individuals. The pre-test and post-test consist of five questions covering material related to the training product. Statistical analysis was performed to compare pre-test and post-test scores using a paired t-test, with a significance level set at $p < 0.05$. Effect size was calculated using Cohen's d to determine the magnitude of the intervention effect. The 20 participants included in the paired t-test analysis were exclusively parents of children with disabilities.

In addition, the study design can be classified as a one-group pretest–posttest evaluation design, commonly used in community-based intervention research to assess program effectiveness in real-world settings. Although this design does not include a control group, it allows assessment of changes before and after the intervention within the same participants. Previous studies have demonstrated that such designs are appropriate for evaluating vocational training and empowerment programs among persons with disabilities, particularly when ethical and logistical constraints limit randomization. Statistical assumptions, including normality of data distribution, were considered prior to conducting the paired t-test analysis to ensure the validity of the results (Reims & Tisch, 2022).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The activity runs for 3 months, starting from July 2025 to September 2025. The activities consist of soap making training with the community of parents of children with disabilities the ABeKa Mom's Craft, a coordination meeting for community service preparation, a socialization meeting for community service activities with the community of parents of children with disabilities, a coordination meeting for the committee for planning the purchase of consumables for soap making, training in making and sewing tote bags with shibori fabric, training in making splash batik fabric for bag material by children and parents of children with disabilities, training in making and sewing tote bags from shibori fabric, then the work of children and parents of children with disabilities is exhibited at the exhibition of works at Taman Krida Budaya Malang.

The program's implementation yielded positive outcomes across several areas.

3.1. Skill Development

Participants successfully acquired new skills in batik ciprat, shibori production techniques, and production of natural liquid soap and solid soap. They demonstrated the ability to independently produce craft materials and convert them into marketable products. Individual participants with mental disabilities and their parents can understand basic entrepreneurship and marketing strategies.



Figure 1. Craft Product Making Training: Shibori Batik Cloth for Tote Bag Material



Figure 2. Craft Product Making Training: Shibori Batik Cloth for Tote Bag Material



Figure 3. Craft Product Making Training: Shibori Batik Cloth for Tote Bag Material

3.2. Production Output

The production period runs three months, from July to September 2025, and the products continue to be sold at Galeri Mbois, an outlet supported by Dinas Koperasi dan Perdagangan (Diskopindag) Malang, East Java. The 30 participants involved consisted of children with disabilities and their parents. Approximately 500 tote bags were produced during the training and mentoring phases. To date, 36 tote bag hampers, 64 bottles of 500ml liquid soap, 48 bottles of 250ml liquid soap, and 100 bars of soap have been sold. This demonstrates effective skill transfer and productivity.



Figure 4. Craft Product Making Training: Shibori Batik Cloth for Tote Bag Material

3.3. Economic Potential

Initial steps toward economic independence were observed:

- Formation of a small-scale production group
- Collaboration with Malang Creative Center (MCC) for product marketing
- Participation in exhibitions such as the event at Taman Krida Budaya Malang



Figure 5. Exhibition of Products Created by People with Disabilities at Taman Krida Budaya, July 29, 2025

3.4. Knowledge Improvement

The improvement in knowledge is evidenced by the increase in scores on the knowledge questionnaire, as measured by pre-tests and post-tests. These tests were completed by 20 participants specifically, parents of children with disabilities. The improvement in knowledge is evidenced by the increase in scores on the knowledge questionnaire, as measured by pre-tests and post-tests. These tests were completed by 20 participants specifically, parents of children with disabilities. The comparison of pre-test and post-test scores is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Comparison of Pre-test and Post-test Scores of Knowledge Improvement

Variable	Mean $\pm$ SD	Min-Max	p-value
Pre-test	52.5 $\pm$ 18.9	20–80	<0.001*
Post-test	97.5 $\pm$ 6.9	80–100	

*Paired t-test

Table 2. Mean Difference and Effect Size of Knowledge Improvement

Variable	Mean Difference	95% CI	Cohen's d	p-value
Post-test – Pre-test	45.0	36.5 – 53.5	2.57	<0.001

Quantitative analysis showed a significant improvement in participants' knowledge following the intervention. The mean pre-test score was 52.5 $\pm$ 18.9, increasing to 97.5 $\pm$ 6.9 on the post-test. Statistical analysis using a paired t-test revealed a highly significant difference ($p < 0.001$). The mean difference was 45.0 points, indicating a substantial increase in knowledge. The calculated effect size (Cohen's $d = 2.57$) indicates an extremely large effect, suggesting that the intervention had a strong impact on participants' understanding.

These findings are consistent with recent empirical evidence demonstrating that vocational training programs significantly improve employment participation and productivity among persons with disabilities. Training not only enhances technical competencies but also contributes to increased labor market inclusion, particularly when programs are aligned with participants' abilities and local economic opportunities. Moreover, improvements in soft skills such as confidence, communication, and social interaction have been identified as key mechanisms through which training interventions influence employment outcomes and long-term independence (Endawansa & Setyonaluri, 2025).

This study demonstrates that continuous, community-based training is a good strategy for empowering persons with disabilities. The findings are consistent with previous research indicating that empowerment programs can enhance participation, autonomy, and social inclusion among individuals with disabilities (Suarez-Balcazar *et al.*, 2023).

The success of this program can be attributed to several key factors ;

First, the training methods were tailored to the participants' abilities. Techniques such as batik ciprat, shibori dyeing, and production of natural liquid soap and solid soap are relatively simple, repetitive, and adaptable, making them suitable for individuals with cognitive and behavioral limitations. Second, the integration of entrepreneurship training played a crucial role in enhancing the program's impact. Participants were not only trained to produce goods but also introduced to basic business concepts, enabling them to see the economic value of their work.

Third, continuous mentoring ensured sustainability. Unlike one-time training programs, ongoing assistance allowed participants to refine their skills, maintain motivation, and gradually build independence. The improvement in participants' skills and confidence aligns with studies showing that vocational training contributes significantly to economic empowerment and livelihood improvement. However, training alone is insufficient; ongoing mentoring and market integration are critical to sustainability (Greenwood *et al.*, 2023). Furthermore, evidence from experimental studies suggests that vocational training can increase employment and income among persons with disabilities, although it may also introduce new social challenges such as stigma and adaptation difficulties (Reims & Tisch, 2022).

This highlights the importance of integrating psychosocial support into empowerment programs. The success of this program can also be attributed to its participatory and continuous approach. Community empowerment initiatives that involve participants actively and provide long-term support are more likely to achieve sustainable outcomes and reduce inequality (Heaton *et al.*, 2024).

The results of this study further reinforce the growing body of literature emphasizing the importance of vocational training as a pathway to economic empowerment and social inclusion for persons with disabilities. Experimental and longitudinal studies have shown that participation in structured training programs can significantly increase employment rates and income levels, although some studies also highlight potential social challenges, such as stigma and self-perception issues, following increased workforce participation. This indicates that empowerment programs should not only focus on skill development but also incorporate psychosocial support and inclusive community engagement strategies. In addition, systematic reviews suggest that successful programs are typically characterized by person-centered approaches, continuous mentoring, and integration with real labor market opportunities, all of which align with the design of the present study (Takasaki, 2024).

This is supported not only by qualitative findings but also by quantitative evidence showing a significant improvement in participants' knowledge. These findings are consistent with previous research indicating that vocational training programs significantly improve both technical and non-technical skills among persons with disabilities. In particular, improvements in soft skills such as self-confidence, communication, and social interaction are often key mediators of successful employment outcomes (Lindsay *et al.*, 2019). The results of this study further support the growing evidence that vocational training is a critical pathway toward economic empowerment and social inclusion for persons with disabilities. Participation in structured training programs has been associated with increased employment opportunities and improved income levels, particularly when combined with supportive environments (Reims & Tisch, 2022).

However, some studies also highlight that increased workforce participation may introduce new challenges, such as social stigma and difficulties with workplace adaptation. This suggests that empowerment programs should integrate psychosocial support alongside skill development to ensure holistic outcomes (Suarez-Balcazar *et al.*, 2023).

A systematic review examines the characteristics of programs and services that lead to competitive employment outcomes for young people with disabilities as they transition from school to work. Drawing on 14 studies published between 2013 and 2023, the review identifies three key factors associated with successful employment outcomes. First, early career planning and exposure to paid work—particularly beginning transition services around age 14 and gaining real work experience before adulthood—significantly increase the likelihood of securing competitive employment. Second, participation in post-secondary education and the attainment of recognized credentials are strongly linked to improved employment prospects, with higher levels of education correlating with better outcomes. Third, employment-focused support services, especially those involving on-the-job training, job placement, and supported employment models (“place then train”), are more effective than classroom-based or generalized training programs. The findings suggest that program quality and relevance are more critical than duration or quantity of services. Despite existing policies, global employment rates for individuals with disabilities remain low, highlighting the need for better-integrated, evidence-based approaches involving education systems, vocational services, and policymakers to improve long-term employment outcomes (Enticott & Dew, 2025).

The increase in mean scores from 52.5 to 97.5, along with a very large effect size (Cohen’s $d = 2.57$), indicates that the intervention had a substantial educational impact. These findings reinforce the effectiveness of structured training programs in enhancing cognitive competencies among individuals with disabilities. This activity is expected to improve the skills, income, and economic independence of the Abeka Moms Craft Disabled Community, as well as reduce the level of dependence on social assistance through the independent production of craft products, such as liquid soap products and solid soap, possessing entrepreneurial skills, and the formation of sustainable disability business groups. Additionally, craft-based training such as batik, shibori, and production of natural liquid soap and solid soap is particularly suitable for individuals with disabilities due to its flexibility and repetitive processes. This allows participants to learn at their own pace while producing economically valuable products.

However, this study has limitations, including its small sample size. In addition, although this study incorporated quantitative analysis, it used a one-group pretest-post-test design within quasi-experimental research, which lacks a control group. Therefore, external factors such as testing effects cannot be completely ruled out. Future research should incorporate quantitative assessments and long-term follow-up to measure sustained economic impact. Plans to continue implementing research and community service activities annually to produce products that can be sold and displayed through continuous production. This includes improving the skills, income, and economic independence of the Abeka Moms Craft community with disabilities, as well as reducing dependence on social assistance.

4. CONCLUSION

This community empowerment program demonstrates that innovative and continuous training can improve skills and income growth among individuals with disabilities. The production of marketable products and the establishment of initial marketing channels indicate strong potential for sustainable economic development. Future programs should focus on scaling up production, strengthening market access, and integrating digital marketing strategies to maximize impact. Continuous support and collaboration with stakeholders are essential to ensure long-term sustainability among persons with disabilities.

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