



The role of health education in improving student health in Indonesian schools

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Abstract

Health plays an important role in supporting educational success, with healthy students tending to have better concentration, endurance and motivation to learn. To achieve this, schools implement health education programmes aimed at improving students' knowledge, attitudes and skills in maintaining and improving their health. The programme includes formal and informal activities integrated in the curriculum, extracurricular initiatives and school health projects. Effective health education holds the potential to address these issues. While existing research has shown that health education can improve students' knowledge, attitudes, and skills related to health, direct evidence of its effect on students' health remains limited. The implications of health education are profound, including improved health knowledge, positive attitudes toward health, and the development of vital health maintenance skills. Additionally, it fosters a healthy learning environment, which is conducive to improved academic outcomes. Future interventions may involve the development of tailored materials, the integration of technology, and collaborative endeavors across multiple stakeholders. In conclusion, health education is a potent tool for enhancing student well-being and, consequently, educational success. By addressing health challenges and promoting healthy behaviors, health education contributes significantly to creating a brighter and healthier future for students in Indonesia and beyond.

Keywords: community health education, health science students, public health, global health education

Introduction

Health is one of the important factors supporting the success of education.¹ Healthy students will have good concentration and endurance so they can learn more effectively. In addition, healthy students will have a higher motivation to learn.² Health education in schools is one of the efforts to improve student health. Health education in schools aims to improve students' knowledge, attitudes, and skills in maintaining and improving their health.

Health education in schools can be carried out through various activities, both formally and informally. Formal activities are conducted through health education subjects that are integrated into the school curriculum. Informal activities are conducted through extracurricular activities, school health activities, and other relevant activities.³

This study aims to determine the role of health education in improving student health in Indonesian schools. This research is important

to determine the effectiveness of health education in improving student health so that it can be used as a basis for improving the quality of health education in schools.

The importance of student health to support educational progress

Health is a condition of physical, mental, and social well-being that enables a person to lead a socially and economically productive life, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO).⁴ Student health supports educational success. As noted above, healthy students will have better concentration and endurance, and also a higher motivation to learn.^{5,6} Research shows there is a strong relationship between healthy behaviour and academic achievement as assessed by grades, standardized tests, graduation rates, and attendance. Evidence-based, well-coordinated, and strategically planned school health programs are needed to close the academic achievement gap and improve health.

Research conducted by the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Indonesia (*Kemenkes RI*) in 2022 showed that the prevalence of stunting in children under 5 years of age in Indonesia reached 24.3%. The prevalence of stunting in children under 5 years of age is one of the health indicators that show the quality of children's health in Indonesia.⁷ The Indonesian Ministry of Health's Health Research and Development Agency (*Balitbangkes*) in 2021 showed that students' knowledge of reproductive health is still low. The results showed that only 62.5% of junior high school students and 57.5% of high school students had good knowledge about reproductive health.⁸

A report from UNICEF Indonesia in 2022 showed that the prevalence of obesity in primary school-aged children in Indonesia reached 23.5%. The prevalence of obesity in primary school-aged children is one of the health indicators that indicates an unhealthy diet in children in Indonesia.⁹

Based on these data and research results, there are still health issues that need to be

addressed among students in Indonesia. These health problems include a lack of knowledge about reproductive health,^{10,11} the high prevalence of risky sexual behaviour,¹² and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health.¹³ Health education is one of the efforts to address these health problems; with effective health education, it is expected to improve student health and create a healthy learning environment.¹⁴ Health education should be tailored to the age, needs, and characteristics of students and involve various parties such as teachers, parents, and the community.^{15,16}

Research on the role of health education in improving student health is limited. Some studies have shown that health education can improve students' knowledge, attitudes, and skills in maintaining and improving their health. However, research that shows the effect of health education on students' health directly is limited.

Fadillah's research showed that students who participated in health education had better positive attitudes toward health than students who did not participate in health education. The study also showed that students who participated in health education had better skills in maintaining and improving health than students who did not participate in health education.¹⁷

Implications for the Role of Health Education

Health education is one of the important efforts to improve public health, including the health of students in schools. Health education in schools aims to improve students' knowledge, attitudes, and skills in maintaining and improving their health.

Based on the results of the research conducted by Hou,¹⁸ health education can have various positive implications, including the following:

Improve students' knowledge about health

Health education can provide students with information and a better understanding of various aspects of health, such as physical, mental, and social health. This can help students to make healthier decisions in their daily lives.

Shaping students' positive attitude towards health

Health education can help students develop positive attitudes towards health, such as awareness of the importance of health, the desire to live healthy, and the responsibility to maintain their health. These positive attitudes towards health can encourage students to adopt healthy behaviours in their daily lives.

To develop students' skills in maintaining and improving health

Health education can help students develop skills in maintaining and improving health, such as self-care skills, health decision-making skills, and coping skills. These skills can help students to manage their health independently.

Creating a healthy learning environment

Health education can help create a healthy learning environment, both physically and socially. A healthy learning environment can support the teaching and learning process and improve student achievement.

Recommendations to Improve the Role of Health Education

To improve the role of health education, planned and targeted efforts are needed from various parties, including the government, schools, and communities. Here are some recommendations that can be made:

- There is a need for government support to provide adequate resources for health education in schools, such as competent educators, relevant educational materials and methods, and supporting facilities and infrastructure.
- There needs to be a commitment from the school to implement health education effectively. This can be done by developing a comprehensive health education program, involving various related parties and conducting regular evaluations.
- There needs to be awareness from the community to support health education in schools. This can be done by providing socialization and education about the importance of health education to the community.

Possible health education interventions for the future

Development of health education materials and methods

Health education materials and methods need to be developed to better suit the needs and characteristics of students in the future. Health education materials need to include various health issues that are current and relevant to students' lives. Health education methods need to be developed to be more interesting and interactive so that students are more interested in following them.

Use of information and communication technology

Information and communication technology can be utilized to improve the effectiveness of health education. Information and communication technology can be used to present health education materials more interestingly and interactively. In addition, information and communication technology can be used to provide feedback to students more quickly and precisely.

Cooperation with various parties

Collaboration with various parties, such as the government, schools, and communities, needs to be enhanced to improve the effectiveness of health education. This collaboration can be done to develop a comprehensive health education program that involves various related parties.

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