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Life Skills Implementation Program for Orphans from A Sociological Perspective at The Harapan Jitra Orphanage in Bengkulu City

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Article Info

Article history:

Received 2026-01-09

Revised 2026-02-04

Accepted 2026-02-10

Keywords:

Effectiveness Program

Life Skills

Orphans

Sociological Perspective

ABSTRACT

Orphans often face limitations in acquiring life skills, social values, and independence because they do not grow up in a complete family environment. This condition raises questions about how effectively orphanages can function as social institutions in preparing children to live independently in society. This study aims to analyze the effectiveness of implementing a life skills program for orphans at the Harapan Jitra Orphanage in Bengkulu City from a sociological perspective, particularly in terms of socialization, value internalization, and children's social integration. The research employed a qualitative, descriptive approach. Data were collected through participant observation and in-depth interviews with the orphanage's head, caregivers, foster children, and alumni, as well as through document analysis to strengthen empirical findings. Data were analyzed through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The results show that the life skills program at Harapan Jitra Orphanage is quite effective in fostering children's independence both socially and functionally. Through routine daily activities, vocational training, productive work, and spiritual guidance, the orphanage serves as a secondary socialization agent, replacing the family's role in instilling discipline, responsibility, cooperation, and a work ethic. Children not only gain basic and vocational skills but also experience positive changes in attitudes, social identity, and adaptive abilities in broader society. Based on Talcott Parsons' AGIL framework, the program fulfills adaptation, goal attainment, integration, and latency functions. Nevertheless, effectiveness is constrained by limited funding, professional staff, and training facilities. Overall, the program contributes to preparing orphans to be independent and socially integrated individuals.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Humans are essentially social beings inextricably linked to their social environment. Each interacts through roles, statuses, norms, and values that shape the social order and guide their behavior [1]. Children, as part of the social structure, hold a strategic position

as the next generation, expected to adapt, develop, and play an active role in society [2]. However, in reality, not all children receive the opportunity to grow and develop optimally. Various factors, such as economic, social, and family conditions, place some children in vulnerable situations, including orphans and abandoned children [3]. They lack the primary figure responsible for fulfilling basic needs, instilling values, character formation, and providing the social guidance they should receive within a family. The absence of parents often disrupts a child's social, emotional, and psychological development, necessitating community- and state-level social interventions [4].

This situation is reinforced by data from the Ministry of Social Affairs, which recorded 67,368 abandoned children in Indonesia [5], and by the results of the 2018 National Socioeconomic Survey (Susenas), which showed a high number of children not attending school or dropping out. These facts illustrate that the protection and fulfillment of children's rights have not been fully met, especially for children who have lost family care. Therefore, the existence of social welfare institutions such as orphanages is crucial as an alternative form of care that can provide protection, education, character development, and psychosocial support [6]. These institutions not only function as providers of basic needs but also as social institutions that carry out socialization, value internalization, and foster children's independence, particularly through relevant life skills programs that prepare them for life in society after leaving the orphanage [7].

From a sociological perspective, children are understood not only as individuals in the biological and psychological stages of development, but also as part of a social system with specific rights, functions, and roles within the societal structure [8]. Children interact with their social environment through socialization, the internalization of values, and the formation of self-identity, which is shaped by family, school, community shape shape, and the state [9]. Law Number 35 of 2014 concerning Child Protection affirms that every child has the right to education, care, protection from violence, and the opportunity to develop in accordance with their interests, talents, and potential [10]. This principle demonstrates that the state and society have a collective responsibility to ensure the fulfillment of children's rights, especially those living in vulnerable situations, such as orphans. Without parental figures, children are in a vulnerable social position, requiring the intervention of social institutions to ensure their continued growth and development, character development, and readiness to adapt to society [11].

One form of this social intervention is realized through orphanages or Child Welfare Institutions (LKSA), which serve as substitutes for family care. These institutions not only provide basic needs such as food, shelter, and education, but also serve a secondary socialization function, crucial for shaping children's attitudes, values, behavior, and independence. In Bengkulu Province, the number of children in need of alternative care continues to increase. According to 2023 data from the Bengkulu City Social Service, more than 500 children are in the care of various orphanages, including the Harapan Jitra Orphanage, which houses more than 40 orphans and children from low-income families. Orphanages play a strategic role as social institutions tasked with preparing children to live independently through moral guidance, education, spiritual strengthening, and the provision of life skills. In this context, orphanages serve not only as places to live but also

as venues for identity formation, social learning, and the development of independence for children who have lost the support of their immediate families.

One form of this development is a life skills program. According to the WHO, life skills are the ability to behave adaptively and positively in the face of the demands of everyday life. For children in orphanages, mastering life skills is an essential preparation for living independently after leaving the institution [12].

2. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative, descriptive research design to deeply understand the processes, meanings, and experiences related to the implementation of the life skills program at the Harapan Jitra Orphanage in Bengkulu City. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to explore social realities holistically, particularly the processes of socialization, value internalization, and the development of independence among foster children within the orphanage's institutional setting.

The research was conducted at the Harapan Jitra Orphanage in Bengkulu City, as this institution systematically implements a structured life skills program as part of its child development and care model. The research sources consisted of primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected from key informants, including the orphanage's head, caregivers, administrators, foster children, and alums. Informants were selected using purposive sampling based on their direct involvement and experience with the life skills program. Secondary data were collected from institutional documents, program reports, archival records, photographs, and written documentation related to daily activities at the orphanage.

Data collection techniques included observation, in-depth interviews, documentation, and Focus Group Discussions (FGD). Observation was conducted to directly examine the implementation of the life skills program, daily routines, social interactions among children, and patterns of guidance provided by caregivers. In-depth interviews were carried out using semi-structured guidelines to capture informants' perceptions, experiences, and interpretations of the program's effectiveness. Documentation was used to support field findings through official records, activity reports, and visual evidence of program implementation. Meanwhile, FGDs were conducted with groups of foster children and caregivers to gain collective perspectives and enrich understanding of social dynamics within the orphanage.

The data analysis followed a qualitative model comprising three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. In the data reduction stage, the researcher summarized, selected key information, identified themes and patterns, and eliminated irrelevant data to produce a clearer and more focused dataset. In the data display stage, the reduced data were organized into descriptive narratives, thematic categories, or matrices to facilitate interpretation and analysis. This stage enabled the researcher to understand relationships among findings and construct meaningful explanations. In the conclusion-drawing stage, initial conclusions were formulated based on emerging patterns. These conclusions were considered tentative and continuously verified against additional field

data. Conclusions were drawn only when supported by strong, consistent, and valid evidence, ensuring their credibility and reliability.

To ensure data validity, the study applied qualitative trustworthiness criteria, including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was achieved through triangulation of sources and methods by comparing data from interviews, observations, documentation, and FGDs. Transferability was enhanced by providing rich, detailed descriptions of the research context, enabling readers to assess its applicability to other settings. Dependability was maintained through systematic documentation of all research procedures, while confirmability was ensured through researcher reflexivity and an audit trail demonstrating that findings were grounded in empirical data rather than personal bias.

Procedurally, the research began with a preliminary study to understand the orphanage's initial conditions and its life skills program. The researcher then conducted field data collection through observation, interviews, documentation, and FGDs in a cyclical manner. Data collection continued until data saturation was reached, at which point no new significant information emerged. Finally, the data were comprehensively analyzed, yielding findings and conclusions on the effectiveness of the life skills program in fostering independence among foster children at the Harapan Jitra Orphanage in Bengkulu City.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Results

Life Skills Program

Improving Foster Children's Knowledge and Skills

The *life skills* program at Harapan Jitra Orphanage is integrated into the daily activities of the foster children and delivered through simple skills training tailored to the orphanage's conditions and needs. This program includes the development of *daily living*, *vocational skills*, and *spiritual skills* to foster children's independence. Children are trained to master basic skills such as cooking, washing clothes, cleaning the environment, and managing study time. In addition, the orphanage develops vocational skills such as catfish cultivation, chicken care, and making simple drinks (pop ice), the results of which are used to meet the orphanage's needs and sold to the surrounding community.

The program is implemented in stages and sustainably through daily activities. Children not only attend formal schooling but also receive direct guidance from caregivers to master practical life skills. The head of Harapan Jitra Orphanage emphasized that the primary focus of the *life skills program* is to develop children's independence so they are ready to face life outside the orphanage. This is as conveyed by the following TZI informant: We are here not only to teach the children to be good at reciting the Quran and studying, but also to be independent in their daily lives. Many of them arrive without knowing how to cook, do laundry, or manage their own study time. Therefore, we train them slowly, starting with simple things like washing clothes, cleaning their rooms, cooking rice, and caring for catfish and chickens. We also teach them how to sell their produce, for example, selling pop ice drinks to residents. We want them to be comfortable

facing life when they leave the orphanage, having become accustomed to working, striving, and being responsible for themselves." (Interview with informant TZI, July 20, 2025)

Based on the interview excerpt, it can be understood that the *life skills program* is intended not only to meet the basic needs of foster children but also to serve as a contextual learning tool that prepares them to become independent and adaptive individuals. The learning process is carried out through direct practice, or experiential learning, in which children learn from real experiences in everyday life. In *life skills theory*, skills such as cooking, washing, and maintaining environmental cleanliness are included in the category of *daily living skills*, which serve as the main foundation for developing independence.

In addition to basic skills, the *life skills program* has proven effective in improving foster children's vocational skills through simple entrepreneurial activities. Catfish farming, chicken raising, and selling popsicle sticks provide work-based learning opportunities that train children in responsibility, teamwork, and the management of a simple business. Children's direct involvement in these activities provides meaningful work experience and fosters self-confidence. One foster child, AR, expressed this:

"At first, I could not do anything, Ma'am. Nevertheless, after attending additional training, I can now help take care of the catfish pond. We feed them, clean them, and then sell the harvest. It feels good to earn my own money, even if it is just a little. It feels like I am appreciated, and I can help the orphanage too." (Interview with informant AR, July 20, 2025)

This statement demonstrates that *vocational skills activities* not only provide technical skills but also build self-confidence and self-esteem in foster children. Children begin to understand the meaning of work, effort, and contribution, both for themselves and for the foster care community.

In addition to practical and vocational skills, the orphanage also instills spiritual skills through regular religious guidance, such as Quran recitation, group prayer, and congregational prayer. This spiritual guidance serves as a foundation for character development and strengthening the children's moral values. A caregiver with the initials FR explained:

"Every morning and night, we invite the children to recite the Koran and pray together. We instill in them that hard work and independence must be accompanied by sincerity and gratitude. If they only have skills but no morals, they will easily give up. So we emphasize that studying is an act of worship, and working is also an act of worship." (Interview with informant FR, July 20, 2025)

Within the framework of Talcott Parsons' structural-functional theory, this spiritual development reflects the *latency function* (L), which maintains patterns of values, norms, and social motivation. Meanwhile, vocational and *daily living skills* reflect the *adaptation* (A) and *goal attainment* (G) functions, as the orphanage adapts to limited resources by creating productive activities that lead to the child's goal of independence.

Table 1. Improving Foster Children's Knowledge and Skills

No	Observed Aspects	Conditions Before the Program	Condition After Program
1	Independence in Daily Activities (<i>Daily Living Skills</i>)	Children rely on caregivers for basic activities such as cooking, washing, and cleaning their rooms; they lack discipline and rarely take initiative.	Children can carry out household activities independently, are disciplined in following duty schedules, and are responsible for maintaining the cleanliness and order of the environment.
2	Financial <i>Literacy</i>	Not understanding how to manage money, tending to be wasteful, and not used to saving.	Able to manage pocket money, prioritize needs, and get used to saving and using money wisely.
3	Vocational <i>Skills</i>	Have no work or business experience, passive, and only accept help.	Able to participate in simple entrepreneurial activities such as selling <i>pop ice</i> , managing catfish farming, and producing snacks.
4	Cooperation and Social Responsibility	Children are reluctant to cooperate, often ignore tasks, and are dependent on caregiver instructions.	Children show a cooperative attitude, take responsibility in group activities, and complete tasks independently without being asked.
5	Self-Confidence and Social Interaction (<i>Personal-Social Skills</i>)	Awkward, shy, and reluctant to interact with outsiders; not brave enough to express an opinion.	More confident, communicative, and able to serve guests or sell products from the orphanage's activities politely and boldly.

Source: Research results, July 20-22, 2025

Theoretically, improving foster children's skills can be understood as part of the *adaptation function* (A) within Talcott Parsons' AGIL framework. The institution's role is to provide the facilities, resources, and guidance that enable children to adapt to the demands of life. Improving basic and vocational skills not only helps children manage their own needs but also provides them with opportunities to understand the world of work and broader social interactions [13]. Thus, *the life skills learning process* functions as a social adaptation mechanism, preparing children to face the challenges of life outside the institution.

Overall, the research results show that implementing the life skills program at Harapan Jitra Orphanage has significantly improved foster children's knowledge and skills. Children who were previously dependent on caregivers are now able to manage their daily needs, actively participate in productive activities, and demonstrate changes in attitudes toward more disciplined, confident, and responsible behavior. The integration of *daily living, vocational, and spiritual skills development* makes this program not only focused on technical skills but also on character building and social readiness for orphans to face life in society.

Changes in Attitude and Behavior

Before the implementation of the life skills program, the attitudes and behaviors of children at Harapan Jitra Orphanage generally still showed a high level of dependence on caregivers. Children tended to lack discipline, often procrastinated on assignments, and showed minimal initiative in carrying out daily activities without direct guidance. In terms of social interaction, some children were passive, shy, and reluctant to communicate with outsiders, including guests who visited the orphanage. They spent more time in their rooms

or playing with peers, without paying attention to the cleanliness and orderliness of the orphanage. Low self-confidence and a fear of trying new things resulted in children's potential not developing optimally.

Furthermore, children's behavior prior to the life skills program was characterized by low discipline and limited social awareness. Children were not yet accustomed to working together, helping each other, or taking shared responsibility for orphanage activities. Some children demonstrated disobedience by skipping shifts, arriving late to religious services, and showing little respect for caregivers. This situation indicates that before the systematic development program, the values of independence, hard work, and self-control had not been firmly internalized in the children.

The research results show that implementing the life skills program at Harapan Jitra Orphanage has led to significant changes in the attitudes and behaviors of the foster children. The children have become more disciplined, confident, and independent in carrying out daily activities. They are no longer completely dependent on caregivers, but have begun to show initiative in completing personal and collective tasks. This change is evident in simple entrepreneurial activities such as selling *popsicles* and homemade ice cream, where the children are required to interact directly with the community.

One of the foster children at the junior high school level, with the initials SD, revealed the changes he felt after participating in the *life skills program*:

"I used to be very shy, Ma'am. If a guest came to the orphanage, I would immediately hide in my room because I was afraid of being asked to speak. However, since I started helping out selling popsicles, I have gotten used to talking to people. I was nervous at first, but I gradually grew to enjoy it because many of the customers are friendly and like to ask questions. Now I often offer them directly to neighbors or schools during events. So, I feel more courageous, and I am no longer afraid of saying the wrong thing." (Interview with informant SD, July 23, 2025)

This quote demonstrates a marked change in the foster children's self-confidence and social communication skills. Involvement in simple entrepreneurial activities serves as an effective social learning tool, as the children gain firsthand experience in interacting, communicating, and taking responsibility for their roles. Previously passive and withdrawn children are now becoming more open, communicative, and confident in their broader social environment.

The changes in the foster children's attitudes and behavior were also confirmed by the orphanage administrators, who witnessed their development over time. A caregiver with the initials FR said:

"If we look at their daily behavior, the children are much more confident and disciplined now. Previously, they tended to wait for orders, but now, when there is an activity, they jump into action without being asked. Some children used to be very quiet, even afraid to speak to outsiders. After participating in training and selling small items, they have become more open and active. When guests arrive, they greet them and proudly explain their activities." (Interview with informant FR, July 23, 2025)

These testimonials reinforce the finding that *life skills programs not only* improve technical skills *but also* shape children's personalities toward greater maturity. Structured

daily routines, such as cleaning schedules, study activities, and religious services, play a crucial role in fostering discipline and a sense of responsibility. Children become accustomed to managing their time, carrying out obligations without coercion, and completing tasks independently.

Based on observations, children's increased self-confidence is directly proportional to their social interaction skills. Small-scale entrepreneurship activities and skills training provide children with a space to learn to collaborate, discuss issues, accept criticism, and find solutions together when facing problems. This process contributes to the development of *social maturity* and the children's readiness to adapt to social life outside the orphanage.

Foster children's independence is also reflected in their ability to care for personal needs, such as washing clothes, preparing simple meals, and helping younger siblings at the orphanage. These changes demonstrate the internalization of the values of responsibility and self-control, as children begin to recognize that meeting their daily needs is a personal responsibility that must be managed independently. This habituation forms relatively stable positive behaviors that have the potential to persist long-term when the children return to the community (Eunice et al., 2023:1094).

From the perspective of Talcott Parsons' structural-functionalism theory, changes in foster children's attitudes and behavior reflect the fulfillment of the goal attainment (G) and integration (I) functions. *Life skills programs* serve as a means for foster care institutions to achieve their goal of fostering independence while simultaneously integrating them into social life through interactions with their surroundings. Therefore, changes in children's behavior do not occur instantly but rather result from a systematic, ongoing developmental process.

Independence in Everyday Life

Independence is one of the main indicators of the success of the *life skills program* at Harapan Jitra Orphanage. Research shows that children at the orphanage have shown significant improvement in their ability to manage their daily lives independently. This independence is reflected in the children's habits of organizing daily activities without being highly dependent on caregivers. The children are accustomed to waking up on time, preparing school supplies, washing their own clothes, keeping their rooms and surroundings clean, and participating in study and religious activities according to a predetermined schedule. Furthermore, they are also beginning to manage their pocket money wisely, saving money, and actively participating in productive activities at the orphanage, such as cooking and helping with small businesses.

Alum testimonials demonstrate that the *life skills program* has tangible long-term outcomes. The habits of discipline, responsibility, and independence instilled during their time at the orphanage serve as crucial tools for children as they adapt to education, the workplace, and social life after leaving the institution.

From the perspective of Talcott Parsons' structural-functionalism theory, fostering children's independence reflects the success of their adaptation (A) and goal-*attainment* (G) functions. Children can adapt to environmental demands (adaptation) and achieve developmental goals of independence and personal responsibility (goal attainment). The

independence formed is not only technical but also concerns the child's mental and social readiness to face life more broadly.

Overall, the independence foster children at Harapan Jitra Orphanage have achieved in their daily lives demonstrates that the *life skills program* has successfully developed individuals who are disciplined, responsible, and able to manage their lives independently. This success is an important indicator that the program's impact is felt not only during the children's time at the orphanage but also after they return to the community.

Obstacles in Program Implementation

Although the *life skills program* at Harapan Jitra Orphanage has had a positive impact on the development of skills, attitudes, and independence among foster children, research indicates that its implementation continues to face several structural and technical challenges. These obstacles affect the program's optimization, including the variety of training, the quality of guidance, and the sustainability of its impact on foster children.

The main obstacles facing the orphanage are limited funding and a shortage of human resources. Financially, the orphanage remains heavily dependent on community donations and irregular social assistance. This situation limits the orphanage's ability to develop more varied and relevant skills programs to meet current needs. As a result, life skills programs still focus on basic skills and small household businesses, such as cooking, laundry, raising catfish and chickens, and selling popsicles. Nevertheless, social and economic developments demand that children acquire more modern, competitive skills, such as computer proficiency, technical skills, and creative expertise.

The Head of Harapan Jitra Orphanage explained openly about these limitations:

"We actually want to offer more varied training, such as computer training, sewing, or other technical skills. However, the challenge is funding. So far, we have relied solely on community assistance or regular donors, and even that can be unpredictable. So, we are focusing on simple activities that can be implemented with the existing facilities." (Interview with TZI informant, July 25, 2025)

The quote demonstrates that budget and human resource limitations are structural factors hampering program development. The orphanage has a vision and awareness of the importance of improving children's skills, but this is not supported by adequate institutional capacity. This situation emphasizes that the success of the *life skills program* depends not only on the orphanage's internal commitment but also heavily on ongoing external support.

Besides limited funding, another obstacle faced is the lack of professional mentors. *Life skills programs* are largely run by foster carers with basic skills, so skills development remains limited to daily practice. While children gain hands-on experience, they lack in-depth, structured technical training that meets workplace standards. A foster child with the initials NL expressed her hopes as follows:

"Sometimes I want to learn other things, like computers or motorcycle repair, but there are no trainers here. We learn from the caregivers, but their knowledge is limited. I want to have skills I can use when I leave the orphanage." (Interview with informant NL, July 25, 2025)

This statement reflects the need among foster children for more varied and relevant learning experiences relevant to the modern workplace. The limited availability of professional staff has resulted in traditional learning processes that lack innovation. In the long term, this situation may limit foster children's competitiveness in the workforce, which demands specialized skills and certifications (Syafarini, 2023).

Another obstacle is the varying levels of internal motivation among foster children. Research shows that not all children share the same enthusiasm or readiness to participate in life skills programs. Some children demonstrate high levels of enthusiasm, while others remain passive and require more intensive encouragement. These differences in motivation are influenced by the child's psychological background, life experiences, and social circumstances prior to entering the orphanage. A foster child with the initials HN explained:

"Some kids are incredibly enthusiastic, but others need to be prompted before they get started. We understand that their backgrounds are diverse. So we have to be patient and keep motivating them to keep participating." (Interview with informant HN, July 26, 2025)

These testimonials *confirm* that the success of a *life skills program* depends not only on program design but also on an empathetic and ongoing mentoring approach. Children with traumatic experiences or low self-esteem require more intensive emotional support to actively engage in the development process. Without consistent motivational support, achieving the effectiveness of a life skills program will be challenging (Khikmah, 2021:63).

When analyzed using Talcott Parsons' structural functionalism theory, these constraints are closely related to the suboptimal *adaptation* (A) and *integration* (I) functions. The adaptation function has not been fully implemented because resource limitations hinder the orphanage's ability to adapt to modern skills demands. Meanwhile, the integration function has also been suboptimal because collaboration between the orphanage and external parties, such as social services, job-training institutions, vocational schools, and the business world, remains sporadic and institutionally unstructured.

Overall, the obstacles in implementing the *life skills program* at Harapan Jitra Orphanage reflect systemic limitations in the orphanage's management. The orphanage faces a dilemma between the increasingly complex needs of children and the limited resources available. Therefore, more substantial support from the government, social institutions, and the business world is needed to develop the life skills program in a more varied, professional, and sustainable manner. With structured external collaboration, the *life skills program* at Harapan Jitra Orphanage has the potential to be enhanced into a skills development model that is more adaptive and relevant to the demands of modern life.

Life Skills Program as a Process of Socialization and Internalization of Social Values

From a sociological perspective, the *life skills program* at Harapan Jitra Orphanage can be understood as a secondary socialization process, a mechanism by which individuals learn values, norms, and social roles outside the immediate family environment. Orphans

living in orphanages generally experience a disruption in their primary socialization function due to the loss of parents or an unstable family environment. Therefore, orphanages assume this social role by providing structures, rules, and habits that instill basic social values such as discipline, responsibility, cooperation, and independence.

Life Skills Program as a Mechanism for Social Integration and Empowerment of Orphans

In addition to being a socialization process, the *life skills program* at Harapan Jitra Orphanage can also be understood as a mechanism for social integration for orphans. From a sociological perspective, social integration is the process by which individuals are incorporated into broader social structures and orders. Orphans are a vulnerable group potentially experiencing social marginalization due to economic limitations, the loss of parental figures, and social stigma. The *life skills program* is a systematic effort to prevent social exclusion by equipping children with the skills to function independently and productively.

Life skills activities, such as small businesses, group work, and involvement in orphanage activities, create opportunities for intensive social interaction. Through these interactions, children learn to cooperate, share roles, resolve conflicts, and communicate effectively. In structural-functionalism theory, this condition relates to the integration function (I), which is the effort to maintain order and social cohesion among individuals within a system. *Life skills* programs act as an integrative tool that unites children, caregivers, and the surrounding environment in relatively harmonious social relationships.

Beyond internal integration within the orphanage, the life skills program also prepares children for external integration into society. Simple entrepreneurial activities, such as selling products to residents, allow children to interact directly with the social environment outside the orphanage. This interaction serves as social training for children to understand society's norms, expectations, and dynamics. This way, children do not experience social disconnection when they leave the orphanage, but instead have sufficient social experience to adapt.

Life skills programs can also be understood as a form of social empowerment. Empowerment is not only defined as improving individual skills, but also as a process of increasing children's social capacity to make decisions, manage their lives, and reduce structural dependency. Through *life skills*, *orphans are encouraged to become active participants* in their own lives, not simply recipients of assistance. This reflects a shift from a charitable to an empowering approach.

The life skills program at Harapan Jitra Orphanage serves as an instrument for social integration and empowerment of orphans. This program not only helps children survive economically and psychologically but also prepares them for active participation in the broader social structure. By equipping children with skills, values, and social experiences, the *life skills program* helps create empowered, integrated individuals with a more equal social standing.

3.2. Discussion

Life Skills Program

The life skills program at Harapan Jitra Orphanage is integrated into the daily lives of the foster children and is designed as part of a long-term process of independence development. This program is not merely formal training; it is internalized in children's daily routines through familiarization, mentoring, and hands-on practice. *The life skills* developed include daily living, vocational, and spiritual skills, which are interconnected as a single developmental unit [14]. This approach demonstrates that the orphanage is not only oriented towards meeting the children's basic needs, but also towards developing individuals who can manage their lives independently and responsibly in the future [15].

In terms of knowledge and skills development, children are trained to master basic daily living skills such as cooking, washing clothes, maintaining environmental cleanliness, and managing study and prayer times [16]. These skills are taught through hands-on practice in the orphanage's daily activities, allowing children to learn contextually and repeatedly. The orphanage director emphasized that the program's primary goal is to foster independence in children so they are prepared for life outside the orphanage. Children who were previously dependent on caregivers are gradually trained to take responsibility for their own needs, from simple tasks to more complex ones [17].

In addition to basic skills, the *life skills program* also includes vocational skills through simple entrepreneurial activities, such as catfish farming, chicken raising, and selling popsicle sticks to the local community. These activities not only support the orphanage's finances but also serve as a learning tool for the foster children. The children are directly involved in the entire process, from care and production to sales, providing them with real-world experience in the workplace, teamwork, and responsibility [18]. This experience builds the children's confidence and self-esteem, as they feel they are capable of producing something of value [19].

Research shows that children's involvement in vocational activities positively impacts their personality development. Children begin to understand the meaning of work, effort, and social contribution. One foster child reported that his involvement in catfish farming made him feel valued and empowered to help the orphanage [20]. This demonstrates that vocational skills not only develop technical skills but also foster positive mental attitudes, such as self-confidence, independence, and social responsibility [19].

The life skills program at Harapan Jitra Orphanage also emphasizes spiritual development as a foundation for character building. Activities such as congregational prayer, Quran recitation, and group prayer are conducted routinely and on a schedule. This spiritual development instills the values of sincerity, discipline, and self-control, enabling children to develop not only technical skills but also moral and mental strength. The integration of skills and spiritual values makes the life skills program holistic and oriented towards developing the whole person. The life skills program also brought significant changes to the attitudes and behavior of foster children [21]. Before the program was implemented systematically, children tended to be highly dependent on caregivers, lacked discipline, and showed little initiative. However, after participating in the program, children became more disciplined, responsible, and able to manage their activities

independently. The children no longer waited for orders but began to show initiative in completing both personal and collective tasks. These changes were evident in their daily routines, cleaning activities, and active involvement in the orphanage's activities.

In terms of social interaction, the life skills program has been shown to increase foster children's self-confidence. Simple entrepreneurial activities involving direct interaction with the community serve as an effective social learning medium [22]. Children who were previously shy and passive have become more confident in communicating, serving customers, and expressing their opinions. Caregivers have also observed that the children are now more open, communicative, and able to adapt to the wider social environment. This demonstrates that life skills serve as an important socialization tool for the social development of orphans [23].

Independence in daily life is a key indicator of the success of the life skills program. Children demonstrate the ability to independently manage their daily needs, such as washing clothes, preparing simple meals, managing their time, and maintaining personal and environmental hygiene. Discipline and responsibility are no longer imposed by coercion but have become matters of self-awareness. In fact, older children have begun helping their younger siblings and contributing to the orphanage's productive activities, demonstrating the development of both personal and social independence.

The life skills program is felt not only during the children's stay at the orphanage, but also continues after they leave and live in the community [24]. Alum testimonials demonstrate that the habits of discipline, independence, and responsibility instilled at the orphanage serve as essential tools for facing the world of education and work. Alums can adapt to the demands of social life, work while studying, and manage their time and responsibilities independently. This confirms that the life skills program has sustainable, long-term outcomes.

Sociological Perspective of *Life Skills Program* for Orphans

From a sociological perspective, the *life skills program* at Harapan Jitra Orphanage can be understood as a social mechanism that replaces and continues the interrupted socialization function in orphans. The loss of a parent or an unstable family situation limits children's primary socialization, namely the instillation of basic values and norms within the family. In this context, the orphanage plays a strategic role as a secondary socialization agent, providing social structures, rules, and patterns of habituation to shape children's behavior and character in line with prevailing social values [25].

Life skills programs are a key instrument in this socialization process because values and norms are not taught verbally alone, but through direct practice in everyday life. Activities such as washing clothes, cooking, cleaning, and running a small business enable children to learn about discipline, responsibility, and cooperation in concrete ways. In sociology, this process is known as value internalization, in which social norms are no longer perceived as external rules but become part of an individual's awareness and behavioral orientation. Children begin to understand that independence and discipline are social needs, not simply demands from caregivers.

From the perspective of Talcott Parsons' structural functionalism theory, the process of internalizing values through life skills programs is closely related to the latency function (L), namely, the maintenance and reproduction of value patterns within a social system. Daily routines, religious activities, and the structure of the orphanage's activities help maintain children's social norms and motivation. Through repeated habituation, children are trained to adapt to values considered legitimate and important within the orphanage's social system, thus developing relatively consistent and sustainable behavior [26].

Life skills programs also contribute to the development of orphans' social identities. Before undergoing intensive care, some children viewed themselves as weak, dependent, and lacking a significant social role. However, through experiences engaging in productive activities and receiving recognition for their contributions, children begin to develop new identities as capable, helpful, and valuable individuals. This identity is formed through ongoing social interactions between the children, caregivers, and the orphanage environment, strengthening the children's self-confidence and social self-esteem.

In addition to socialization and the internalization of values, life skills programs also serve as a mechanism for social integration for orphans. From a sociological perspective, social integration refers to an individual's ability to become an integral and functional part of a social system. Orphans are a vulnerable group potentially experiencing social exclusion due to economic limitations, loss of family support, and social stigma. Life skills programs exist to bridge this gap by providing children with relevant social skills and experiences.

Life skills activities based on group work and collaborative efforts create a space for intensive social interaction within the orphanage. Through these interactions, children learn to cooperate, assign roles, obey rules, and resolve conflicts collectively. Within the framework of structural functionalism, this condition is related to the integration function (I), which maintains social cohesion and order within the system. The life skills program acts as a mechanism that unites children from diverse backgrounds into a relatively harmonious social order.

The social integration fostered through the life skills program extends not only internally within the orphanage but also externally to the surrounding community. Simple entrepreneurial activities involving direct interaction with residents allow children to practice navigating social norms and expectations outside the institution. This process serves as a social bridge, preparing children for adaptation when they eventually leave the orphanage. Thus, children do not experience social disconnection; instead, they develop basic social capital to participate in community life. Life skills programs can be understood as a form of social empowerment for orphans. Empowerment involves not only improving technical skills but also increasing an individual's social capacity to make decisions, manage their lives, and reduce structural dependency. Life skills programs encourage children to become active subjects in their own lives, not simply recipients of assistance. This approach demonstrates a shift from a charitable approach to a more sustainable empowerment paradigm.

The social empowerment achieved through life skills programs is also linked to improving orphans' social standing within the community. By acquiring skills, discipline, and work experience, children have greater opportunities to access education, employment, and social networks after leaving the orphanage. This sociologically contributes to reducing social inequality and the risk of intergenerational poverty reproduction, often experienced by vulnerable children.

Overall, from a sociological perspective, the life skills program at Harapan Jitra Orphanage serves as an instrument for socialization, value internalization, social integration, and empowerment of orphans. This program not only equips children with practical skills but also fosters social awareness, self-identity, and readiness to participate in society. Thus, life skills serve as an important foundation for developing empowered, integrated individuals with a more equal social position within the broader social structure.

4. CONCLUSION

This study reveals that the life skills program at Harapan Jitra Orphanage plays an important role in supporting the social and personal development of orphans beyond mere technical training. The program has functioned not only as a set of practical activities but also as a structured social environment that helps children develop adaptive capacities, social awareness, and a sense of responsibility necessary for independent living in society. The orphanage effectively operates as a substitute social institution, shaping children's character and preparing them for social participation beyond the institutional setting. The findings have several practical and theoretical implications. Practically, they suggest that orphanages should integrate life skills programs more systematically into daily caregiving practices rather than treating them as supplementary activities. This study also implies that collaboration with government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and community groups is essential to strengthen program sustainability, professional support, and resource availability. Theoretically, the study contributes to sociological perspectives on socialization and structural functionalism by demonstrating how institutional care settings can fulfill key social functions typically performed by families. This research has several limitations. It focused on a single orphanage in Bengkulu City, with a relatively small number of participants, limiting the generalizability of the findings to other orphanages with different organizational structures or cultural contexts. In addition, the study relied primarily on qualitative data, which reflects participants' perceptions and experiences rather than measurable behavioral outcomes over time. Future research is encouraged to conduct comparative studies across multiple orphanages in different regions to examine variations in the implementation of life skills and their outcomes. Longitudinal studies would also be valuable to track the long-term impact of such programs on children after they leave institutional care.

Furthermore, future studies could combine qualitative and quantitative methods to provide a more comprehensive assessment of program effectiveness. For the general public, this research highlights the importance of community involvement in supporting vulnerable children. It underscores that fostering independence among orphans is not

solely the responsibility of orphanages but a shared social commitment that requires collective action from families, institutions, and society at large.

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