

COMMUNITY-BASED LIFELONG LEARNING IN INDONESIA: A MULTI-CASE STUDY OF GOVERNANCE, LEARNING PROGRAMS, AND COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AT COMMUNITY LEARNING ACTIVITY CENTERS

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Abstract. Community-based non-formal education has a strategic role in expanding access to learning, strengthening life skills, and empowering communities, but studies that specifically map the linkages between governance, learning programs, and community participation as key dimensions of institutional sustainability are still limited. This study aims to analyze community-based lifelong learning in Indonesia through a multi-case study at two Community Learning Activity Centers (PKBM), namely PKBM Widya Bhakti and PKBM Tunas Mulia Gunungpati. A qualitative approach with a multiple-case study design was used, employing in-depth interviews with 10 core informants (managers, tutors or facilitators, and adult learning residents), non-participant observations, and documentation studies. Data were analyzed through the stages of case description, thematic coding, comparison between cases, and implication drawing. The results of the study show that the two PKBMs form a functional community learning ecosystem but differ in governance patterns, program orientation, and forms of participation relevant to institutional continuity. Management-centered governance, programs that focus on equality and life skills education, and institutional community participation appear interconnected in the organization of PKBM provision. This research contributes to the study of non-formal education and lifelong learning. It provides a basis for strengthening community-based education policies and practices to support the achievement of SDG 4 and SDG 8.

Keywords: PKBM, lifelong learning, community-based education, non-formal education, community participation

INTRODUCTION

Community-based non-formal education occupies a strategic position in expanding community learning opportunities beyond the formal education pathway (Bagnall, 2009; Joseph & Said, 2020). In the context of socio-economic changes and the needs of 21st-century skills, non-formal education no longer functions only as an alternative to formal educational services but also as a vehicle for empowerment, strengthening the capacity for living, and expanding citizens' social participation (Roche, 2015). This role has become increasingly evident post-COVID-19 pandemic, which has renewed attention to the social benefits of lifelong learning as well as to flexible and community-rooted forms of educational services (Waller et al., 2021). Communities increasingly need a form of learning that is flexible, contextual, close to local needs, and able to reach groups that are not fully served by the formal education system.

In Indonesia, one of the most prominent forms of non-formal education institutions is the Center for Community Learning Activities (PKBM). PKBM provides learning services to the

community through equality education (Packages A, B, and C), life skills education, skills training, economic empowerment, and community-needs-based learning programs (Lukman, 2021; Tohani, 2015a). The presence of PKBM is not only relevant to access to education but also to strengthening society as a subject of lifelong learning (Tohani, 2015b). However, the implementation of PKBM still faces persistent challenges in institutional governance, program sustainability, educator quality, funding, partnerships, and community participation (Felani, 2019; Hermawan & Suryono, 2016; Irwan, 2017; Meilya et al., 2021). In many cases, the success of the institution is greatly influenced by the manager's ability to build social relationships, identify residents' learning needs, and maintain continuity of stakeholder support (Pamungkas & Fauziah, 2014; Rizka & Hardiansyah, 2016).

The underlying academic problem of this study is that the study of PKBM has so far tended to be descriptive and partial: focusing on the management of equality programs, life skills training, community empowerment, or managerial aspects of the institution separately (Ndraha et al., 2022; Nengsih et al., 2018; Rustan et al., 2020; Salman & Tohani, 2019; Wijayanto & Prasetyo, 2018). There has not been much research that explicitly maps the relationships among governance, learning programs, and community participation as three key dimensions supporting the sustainability of community-based education, especially using a multi-case design that compares PKBMs with different institutional characteristics.

Based on these gaps, this study examines community-based lifelong learning in two PKBMs in Indonesia with the formulation of the problem: (a) what are the governance characteristics of PKBM as a community-based lifelong learning institution; (b) how are the similarities and differences in the learning programs held in the two PKBMs; (c) what form of community participation in the implementation of community-based non-formal education in both PKBMs; and (d) what are the implications of the research findings for strengthening community-based lifelong learning policies and practices in Indonesia.

The novelty of this research lies in three aspects. First, this study uses a multi-case design to compare two PKBMs with different location characteristics, service scales, and program variations. Second, this research not only describes institutions but also maps the relationship between governance, learning programs, and community participation as three key dimensions of the sustainability of community education. Third, this study offers a reading of PKBM as a community learning ecosystem whose sustainability is determined by the interaction among the three dimensions, not by a single factor. Thus, this research is expected to enrich the literature on non-formal education and lifelong learning, while supporting the achievement of SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth).

METHODS

Research Approach and Design

This study employed a qualitative multiple-case study design (Baxter & Jack, 2008) to examine governance, learning programs, and community participation in two non-formal education institutions. Each PKBM constituted a case. The analysis examined institutional practices within each setting and compared patterns across the two cases.

Research Locations and Cases

The study was conducted at PKBM Widya Bhakti and PKBM Tunas Mulia Gunungpati in Indonesia. The institutions were purposively selected to examine the provision of community-based learning across different institutional contexts. The selection criteria were active program

provision for at least two years, learning programs serving adults or late adolescents, accessible institutional documentation, and willingness to participate in interviews, observations, and document review.

Research Participants

The study involved 10 core informants, with five from each PKBM: one institutional manager, one equivalency education tutor, one skills or life skills facilitator, one equivalency education learner, and one skills program participant. The learner participants were aged 18 years or older, and the study did not involve children. This composition included perspectives from institutional management, teaching, and participation in the two types of educational provision. The participant group was consistent with the study's focus on adult and lifelong learning.

Data Collection Techniques

The study used in-depth interviews, non-participant observations, and document review. Interviews with managers, tutors, or facilitators, and adult learners addressed governance, program implementation, and community participation. Observations covered learning activities, management practices, and interactions between the institutions and community members. The documents reviewed included institutional profiles, organizational structures, learning modules, program schedules, evaluation documents, and relevant policy documents.

Data Analysis Techniques and Data Validity

Data analysis comprised transcription and data reduction, thematic coding (Braun & Clarke, 2006), within-case analysis, cross-case comparison, and interpretation of implications and limitations. The analytical categories covered governance, learning programs, community participation, challenges, sustainability, and policy implications. The study reported source and method triangulation (Carter et al., 2014), member checking (Birt et al., 2016), and an audit trail as strategies for supporting trustworthiness.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The findings are organized around governance, learning programs, community participation, and the relationships among these dimensions. PKBM Widya Bhakti and PKBM Tunas Mulia Gunungpati share a community-based service orientation. The comparison identifies a common institutional pattern alongside variation in program provision and community connections. These patterns describe how the institutions organize learning opportunities; they do not establish comparative effects on learner achievement or long-term institutional survival.

Formal Organization and Managerial Dependence

Both PKBMs combine formal organizational arrangements with manager-centered operational coordination. Their formal arrangements include organizational structures, licensing, and reporting relationships with the local education office. Managers play a central role in setting institutional direction, developing partnerships, and mobilizing resources. The institutional pattern thus comprises administrative recognition and dependence on managerial capacity and personal networks. These findings concern the organization of responsibilities; they do not establish how frequently managers make decisions independently or how authority differs between the two PKBMs.

Managerial centrality connects internal coordination with external relationships. The manager occupies a prominent position in organizing institutional activities and securing support from partners. This concentration makes leadership capacity relevant across several areas of provision rather than only administrative work. However, the presence of an organizational chart alone does not show that responsibility for these activities is shared across the institution.

Dependence on management figures and government funding cycles emerges as a vulnerability in the cross-case account. These are distinct forms of dependence: one concerns the concentration of institutional relationships in a person, while the other concerns the continuity of external resources. The findings identify these vulnerabilities without establishing that either institution experienced a leadership transition, a funding interruption, or program closure during the study.

A. Shared Program Core with Contextual Variation

Equivalency education, especially Package C, forms the common core of the two program portfolios. Life skills training, entrepreneurship education, and community empowerment activities extend this provision beyond academic certification. This combination places educational re-entry and practical learning within the same institutional setting. It indicates a broad service orientation, although the availability of several programs does not by itself demonstrate that learners move between them.

The cross-case account identifies the range of skills programs, participant goals, and intensity of partnerships as areas of program variation. Equivalency education provides the common institutional focus, while practical learning broadens the purposes of provision. The available case descriptions do not establish which institution offers a broader skill set or maintains more intensive partnerships. Accordingly, the comparison identifies dimensions of variation without assigning an unsupported institutional ranking. Assessing program quality would additionally require evidence of completion, learning outcomes, and the application of skills.

Both cases also present challenges in aligning learning approaches with adult learners' characteristics and supporting independent learning. Flexibility, therefore, concerns both the learning process and access to provision. The findings identify a common educational challenge across otherwise varied program portfolios: offering relevant opportunities must be accompanied by approaches that enable adults to participate meaningfully in learning. The study does not quantify the prevalence or severity of these challenges across the two institutions.

B. Community Participation in Institutional Activities

Community leaders, alums, and village or sub-district institutions are identified as actors involved in planning, learner recruitment, and resource mobilization. These contributions connect community involvement with the organization and delivery of learning opportunities. Planning concerns program direction, recruitment concerns access to provision, and resource mobilization concerns implementation support. The account identifies these functions collectively; it does not establish that every actor performs every function in both PKBMs. Participation should therefore be understood in relation to the activity undertaken, rather than inferred solely from an actor's association with the institution.

The reported activities can be distinguished by function. Involvement in planning concerns the direction of provision; recruitment connects community members with available learning opportunities; and resource mobilization supports implementation. This functional distinction makes participation more specific than a general statement about community support. It also avoids treating different contributions as interchangeable indicators of involvement.

Participation takes different dominant forms across the cases, while local social structures mediate involvement in both. Community attachment and variation in skills provision feature in the cross-case account as complementary institutional strengths. However, involvement in planning does not establish equal decision-making authority, and resource contributions do not demonstrate that all community groups are represented. The findings support the presence of community involvement but do not establish its depth or inclusiveness.

C. Relationship across the Finding

Taken together, the findings connect managerial coordination, program provision, and community involvement. Managers organize the provision and maintain external relationships; programs provide the activities around which learners and partners engage; and community actors contribute to planning, recruitment, and resource allocation. Table 1 summarizes these reported patterns and distinguishes them from questions that require additional evidence. This synthesis identifies relationships for interpretation rather than a tested causal sequence.

Table 1. Synthesis of institutional patterns and evidential boundaries

Dimension	Reported pattern	Boundary of the finding
Governance	Formal structures coexist with manager-centered coordination and personal networks.	No measured distribution of decisions or evidence of succession outcomes.
Programs	Package C and practical learning share an institutional setting; skills provision and partnerships vary.	No comparative completion, learning outcome, or transition data.
Participation	Community actors contribute to planning, recruitment, and resource mobilization.	No established degree of shared authority or representation.
Sustainability	Dependence on managers and funding cycles accompanies community and program strengths.	No longitudinal test of institutional survival or causal effects.

Discussion

The two cases suggest that PKBM provision can be understood through the interplay among governance, programs, and participation. Governance concerns who coordinates the provision and maintains resources. Programs connect institutional activity with educational needs. Participation connects provision with community knowledge and support. The value of examining these dimensions together lies in identifying how a strength in one area may depend on arrangements in another. This interpretation remains an analytical proposition grounded in the reported patterns, rather than a validated model of institutional sustainability.

Managerial Capacity and Institutional Continuity

The prominence of managers helps explain why formal organizational arrangements provide an incomplete account of how PKBMs operate. A manager's relationships can facilitate

coordination and access to partners, but dependence on those relationships raises questions about whether the institution can retain support beyond the individual. The relevant distinction is between personal capacity and organizational capacity. Personal capacity resides in an individual's knowledge and relationships; organizational capacity requires arrangements that enable others to access, maintain, and extend that knowledge.

Rizka and Hardiansyah (2016) identified participatory strategies, persuasion, and social mapping as approaches to developing non-formal education programs. Their findings locate program innovation within relationships with communities. The present cases direct attention to who maintains such relationships and how concentrated that responsibility becomes. This adds an institutional question to discussions of innovation: whether the capacity to sustain a useful program is shared or remains attached to its initiating manager.

A practical implication is to document partner relationships, clarify responsibilities, and involve tutors and other staff in coordination. These measures could help retain institutional knowledge while preserving the responsiveness associated with local leadership. They are recommendations arising from the identified dependence, not interventions tested in this study. Evidence of their effectiveness would require examining what happens when responsibilities change or a key manager becomes unavailable.

Program Relevance and Adult Learning

The coexistence of equivalency education and practical learning gives the two PKBMs a potentially important role in connecting educational re-entry with continuing skill development. However, a portfolio of activities is only one component of a lifelong learning pathway. A pathway also requires learners to understand available options and receive support when moving between them. The present findings establish the coexistence of provision but leave its integration at the learner level unresolved.

An andragogical interpretation highlights the relationship between program content and adults' purposes, prior experiences, and participation in learning decisions. Ndraha et al. (2022) documented difficulties involving motivation, readiness, understanding, and tutor-learner interactions in another PKBM. Their study helps explain why an adult-oriented institution cannot assume that program access alone produces an appropriate learning experience. In the present cases, the reported challenges of adapting teaching and supporting independent learning make the quality of facilitation a relevant issue alongside program availability.

Tutors could strengthen this connection by identifying learners' entry purposes, using tasks aligned with their existing experiences, and reviewing difficulties during the learning process. Guided independent work should include feedback and opportunities to seek help. These recommendations respond to the challenges described in the findings; they do not imply that the two PKBMs have already implemented or evaluated these practices. Future assessment should distinguish flexible scheduling from flexibility in teaching, learning support, and assessment.

Meilya et al. (2021) identify community participation, program usefulness, relevance, and sustainability as elements of quality improvement and self-reliance in community learning centers. This provides a useful comparison with the present combination of formal and practical provision. Program relevance cannot be inferred simply from the number of courses offered. It requires examining whether learners can apply what they learn and whether the institution can continue to support that learning. Such evidence would strengthen the interpretation of program diversity in both cases.

Participation and Influence on Decisions

Community involvement in planning, recruitment, and resource mobilization provides a basis for interpreting participation as part of institutional governance. Hermawan and Suryono (2016) examined participation across planning, implementation, evaluation, and the use of program results, including material, labor, and idea-based contributions. Their findings offer a more differentiated basis for comparison than a simple distinction between participation and non-participation. The present study identifies several functions of involvement but does not establish equivalent community influence across every stage.

This distinction matters because contributing resources and influencing decisions involve different relationships with the institution. Community members may assist recruitment without shaping program priorities. Similarly, attendance at planning activities may provide consultation without shared authority. The evidence should therefore support separate judgments about who contributes, whose proposals are included in decisions, and who can question those decisions. These are analytical distinctions for interpreting the participation reported here, not additional findings about exclusion in either PKBM.

Managers could use periodic learner and community discussions to record proposed changes and explain which proposals the institution adopts. Such records would make the relationship between consultation and action more visible. They would also support research into whether alums, community leaders, and current learners exercise different kinds of influence. The objective would be to strengthen accountability to participants while retaining the local relationships that support provision.

An Institutional Interpretation of Sustainability

The findings suggest that sustainability involves the capacity to maintain learning opportunities through changing organizational and resource conditions. This interpretation extends beyond whether a PKBM currently offers several programs. A program may attract support while remaining dependent on a single manager or funding cycle. Conversely, a narrower portfolio may still consistently serve learners. Neither possibility can be resolved from program variety alone, and the present comparison does not rank the institutions by sustainability.

Murniati et al. (2024), in a study of community-based tourism in Malaysia, connect community education with stakeholder partnerships and identify dependence on external support as a concern. Although that setting differs from Indonesian PKBMs, it provides a relevant comparison for interpreting the relationship between support and autonomy. External assistance may enable activities while leaving institutions vulnerable if they cannot maintain essential functions independently. The comparison supports attention to resource relationships, but it does not establish equivalent outcomes across the two settings.

The community learning ecosystem interpretation, therefore, concerns coordination among actors and activities. It is useful when it directs analysis toward specific connections: who translates community needs into programs, who maintains the relationships that support delivery, and how learners communicate their experience back to the institution. In this study, these connections offer a basis for further investigation. The contribution is a relational interpretation of the reported institutional patterns, rather than proof that a particular configuration produces sustainable outcomes.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Institutional support should address both shared management capacity and the competence of individual leaders. Relevant priorities include accessible administrative records, joint responsibility within partnerships, and preparation for leadership transitions. These priorities follow from manager-centered coordination. Their implementation should remain proportionate to institutional capacity so that documentation supports educational work rather than displacing it.

Program development should connect equivalency education with practical learning through explicit guidance for learners. Institutions could map the relationship between current provision and learners' educational or occupational purposes, then identify gaps in support. Proposed indicators include continuity of participation, program completion, use of acquired skills, and movement into further learning. These are suggested assessment indicators, not outcomes measured by this study.

Partnerships with community organizations and universities could support tutor development, participatory evaluation, and documentation of learning experiences. Such collaboration should define responsibilities and expected benefits for learners. The present study provides a rationale for these arrangements but does not evaluate the effectiveness of university partnerships. Its relevance to SDG 4 and SDG 8 rests on the educational and skills-oriented functions under discussion; it does not demonstrate changes in national indicators or employment outcomes.

Limitations and Future Research

The study involves two purposively selected institutions and 10 core informants. Its findings support contextual interpretation rather than statistical generalization. The reported evidence does not establish the relative prevalence of each theme, the distribution of decision-making authority, or comparative learning outcomes. Differences in program variety and partnership intensity, therefore, require cautious interpretation. They should not be treated as measures of institutional quality.

The evidence presented also does not establish a temporal sequence through which governance, programs, and participation affect continuity. Explanations involving local resources, institutional history, or partner availability remain possible. Future research should provide detailed within-case accounts, trace changes over time, and compare institutional processes with learner experiences. Longitudinal evidence on leadership changes, resource continuity, and learner progression would help assess the sustainability propositions advanced here.

CONCLUSION

This multi-case study of PKBM Widya Bhakti and PKBM Tunas Mulia Gunungpati identifies manager-centered coordination, a shared emphasis on equivalency and practical learning, and community involvement in planning, recruitment, and resource mobilization. The findings suggest that these dimensions should be examined together when assessing community-based lifelong learning. They also identify dependence on managers and funding cycles as concerns for institutional continuity. The study contributes an institutional interpretation of PKBM provision and proposes shared management responsibilities, stronger adult learning support, and more accountable participation as priorities for practice. Further evidence is needed to establish how these arrangements influence learner outcomes and sustainability over time.

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