

# Reckoning the Improvement of Community Independence at Community Learning Activity Center in Indonesia

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## ABSTRACT

The Community Learning Activity Center, or PKBM, is one of the institutions that contribute to the review and development of community-based education. Community-based education attempts to understand and identify needs and how to meet them while considering the community's capabilities. As such, this study seeks to explain the community activity center's role as a centre for community empowerment to increase community independence. The method used in this study is a literature study with the obtained data from articles published in national journals. The results show that many PKBMs are not optimal for educational activities due to various problems. Appropriate empowerment strategies are needed to create an independent community more quickly. Besides that, it is also necessary to have competent PKBM management with technical capabilities in education and community empowerment and innovative empowerment programs so that the implementation can be successful.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Education is critical for every human being. Education is a deliberate and organized attempt to foster a learning environment and process. Students actively cultivate their potential for religious-spiritual strength, self-control, personality, intelligence, noble character, and the skills necessary for themselves, society, nation, and state (Hidayat, 2012). Education aims to develop an individual's potential in such a way that it will benefit his or her life in the future, both consciously and unconsciously. If the community relies on formal education, they will not increase their knowledge and abilities; therefore, non-formal education must complement formal education (Sudarsana, 2016).

Non-formal education, commonly referred to as PNF, is any organized educational activity held outside school education, separately or as an essential part of a more comprehensive activity to provide extraordinary services to learning citizens in achieving learning goals (Dacholfany, 2018). Non-formal education is present in the community, together with formal education, to ensure that national education goals are achieved. Non-formal education is also one of the essential pillars of educating the nation (Istiqomah, 2016). Not all levels of society can take the stories of formal education. Many

obstacles and limitations occur in the community, especially in the lower classes of society. Economic limits, time constraints, age problems, the need for the world of work, and distance issues are fundamental reasons for the presence of institutions managed by the community within the scope of non-formal education (Bartin, 2006).

These institutions have a purpose and concern in providing a place for lower-class people to continue learning opportunities (Combs, 1985). This is where the critical position of non-formal education is based on community needs. Community-based education is education held by the community, is in the midst of society, relies on the strength of the community, answers the needs of the community, and the management of education is in the hands of the neighbourhood (Syukri, 2010). Community-based education leads to community independence in managing their education. One of the forums that organize education based on needs and organized by the community in Indonesia is the Community Learning Activity Center (PKBM) (Raharjo et al., 2016).

PKBM is a place of local learning outside the formal education system, both in rural areas and in other sites. PKBM is usually built and managed by the local community to open up learning opportunities for the community and improve the quality of life (Almaidah, 2017). The birth of the PKBM institution is based on the idea that is improving the quality of community life, both individually and in groups, can be done by the community itself by relying on the ability to manage various potentials owned by the community independently, creatively, and usefully (Suminar, 2007).

As an institution founded by, from, and for the community, PKBM has the potential as an independent institution. According to Hiryanto (2009), although at the outset, many PKBMs depended on assistance and block grant funds from the government, in the long term, it is expected that most PKBMs will grow independent; in this case, the dominant role of the government which has been decreasing and is more focused on the part of the government. Facilitation will be able to go hand in hand with the independence of PKBM. PKBM will stand firmly on community self-reliance. According to Sihombing (1999), institutionalizing PKBM is to explore, grow, develop and utilize all the potential in the community for the most significant possible empowerment of the community itself.

PKBM is expected to be an institution that can provide services to the community to access various opportunities that exist outside their environment to meet their daily needs. The opportunities that exist in the community are very diverse, both providing economic benefits, developing business capabilities, developing fun activities, and opportunities to obtain business development and increase the products or services produced (Susanti, 2014). In this case, PKBM, as an institution engaged in educational development, has a strategic function, namely acting as a bridge or intermediary between the interests of individuals or target groups and the community who need services or products from PKBM (Wahyudin et al., 2021).

In its development, many PKBMs are not optimal in organizing various educational activities due to multiple problems PKBM both in aspects of management, quality of human resources, availability of facilities, and the community environment where PKBM is located (Tohani, 2010). In institutional management, PKBM seems to be held less varied, meaning that educational programs carried out by PKBM tend not to have breakthroughs that allow innovative programs to be realized. Likewise, in terms of quantity, the program implemented is a routine PKBM program as previously implemented programs, for example, only organizing functional literacy, equality, and life skills programs (Nugroho, 2017).

PKBM itself is one of the embodiment strategies that have been, are being, and will continue to be initiated and organized to explore and develop community-based education. This is a concept and aspect of reference for work outside school education (PLS) (Putra, 2017). In addition to package pursuit activities, there are also empowerment programs in productive skills oriented to current needs, including courses intended for mothers, young women, and youth, such as sewing, screen printing, mechanic, and cooking courses. All of this aims to improve the skills and productivity of the community so that they become independent, which ultimately enhances the neighbourhood's standard of living (Saleh, 2020). On the basis of the foregoing, it is required to establish a community empowerment

strategy that will assist the community in becoming more empowered because no accurate outcomes or modifications have been discovered regarding whether or not this program is effective enough to empower the community. The success of the program cannot be isolated from the tactics employed during the program implementation process; nevertheless, in order to determine this, an assessment of the process must be conducted. It is possible to determine whether or not the program is implementing the community empowerment strategy based on the description of the program implementation process.

Previously, there has been some publications that highlighted the success of PKBM as a community activity centre, such as the study of Mutiara & Koesmawan (2020) that implemented strategic management to organize the PKBM in order to achieve a good service standard. Other similar studies were also conducted by Himayaturohmah (2017), Mulyono, 2018, and Rosadi & Herawan (2021) in efforts to improve the services of PKBM. The current study would like to complete the literature by documenting some publications in a literature study. The expectation of the researcher to conduct this study is for all PKBM practitioners who would like to manage such organizations, and they must consider some significant aspects that can support the success of PKBM.

## 2. METHODS

The method approach used is a qualitative study, specifically a literature study. This is closely related to the unique nature of social reality, which involves thinking patterns, perspectives, attitudes, and human behaviour (Sugiyono, 2011). The object of this research is some journal articles that discussed the institution (PKBM) in implementing empowerment strategies for learning citizens. Published in national journals. Sources of data come from documents. The collected documents were 8 articles gathered from national journals, as follows:

**Table 1. The list of data sources from journal articles**

Rizka & Tamba	2021	Noor	2011
Margayanigsih	2016	Haris	2014
Puspito et al.	2021	Fathy	2019
Retno et al.	2015	Kamil & Riduwan	2009

Furthermore, the data obtained were analyzed using the Miles & Huberman interactive model data analysis. The analysis was categorized into two main classifications, namely, community empowerment strategy and the implementation of a community empowerment program at a community learning centre. To get the validity of the data, triangulation, discussions with experts, and extension of observations were carried out.

## 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1. Community Empowerment Strategy

A strategy is a means of mobilizing energy, cash, resources, and equipment in order to accomplish specified goals. The term "community empowerment" refers to a process that builds and strengthens the community's capacity to continue participating in the dynamic development process, enabling the community to solve problems and make decisions independently and autonomously (Noor, 2011). In line with that, Haris (2014) argues that community empowerment is developing conditions and situations in such a way that people have the power and opportunity to build their lives without the impression that development is the result of external forces; society must be made a subject, not an object. Meanwhile, according to Fathy (2019), community empowerment is primarily determined by

the access and control that the development subject has over various resources. The leading development resource is capital, including intelligence, skills, information, technology, funds, and land.

How to empower the community is a particular problem related to the nature of power (containing the notion of "ability," "strength," or "power," as well as relationships between individuals or other social layers. Every individual is born with power. It's just that the power level will differ from one individual to another. This condition is influenced by various interlinking factors such as knowledge, abilities, status, wealth, position, and gender. Finally, create relationships between individuals, with the dichotomy of the subject (ruler) and object (controlled), including rich-poor, male-female, teacher-student, government-citizen, between development agents and the poor, etc. Forms of social relations characterized by the subject and object dichotomy are a relationship that wants to be "fixed" through a process of empowerment (Margayaningsih, 2016).

In a broader sense, the flow of this power is an attempt or aspiration to integrate the poor into more general aspects of life. The empowerment process shifts individual functions from objects to (new) subjects so that relationships between subjects and other subjects will only characterize existing social relations. In other words, the empowerment process changes the old pattern of subject-object relations into issues. This is a crucial prerequisite to realizing the meaning of community empowerment. Relationships that are unequal or justify subordinate or asymmetrical forms of relationships tend to perpetuate oppression and poverty. The transition of object functions into new subjects is a challenge in policy implementation. Many policies are still found under the pretext of empowering and helping the poor but still placing the object in its original position. This means that the poor remain the "controlled and controlled" party by the subject (Retno et al., 2015).

The process of community empowerment begins with the community's independence to enhance their standard of living through the most effective use and access to available local resources. The impoverished are the primary beneficiaries of community empowerment. It's worth noting that women will play a significant role in the process. The community empowerment process is facilitated by a diverse team of facilitators. Men and women should be represented on the community empowerment team. The community empowerment team's primary function is to support the community in carrying out the empowerment process. At the start of the process, the community empowerment team is quite active. Nonetheless, it will decrease during the process until the community is self-sufficient. Community empowerment occurs in stages, including the following:

### **Stage 1. Site selection**

The criteria agreed upon by the institution, its affiliates, and the community are used to determine the areas. To ensure that the institution's goals of community empowerment are met and that the selection of venues is carried out as effectively as possible, these criteria must be established.

### **Stage 2. Socialization of community empowerment**

Creating a discourse with the community is essential to the socialization of community empowerment. In order to spread the word about community empowerment, it's important to get the word out. The community's interest in participating in the initiative will be determined through the socialization process.

### **Stage 3. Community empowerment process**

The community empowerment process consists of (a) Study of participatory rural conditions, (b) Group development, (c) Preparation of plans and implementation of activities, and (d) Participatory monitoring and evaluation. The purpose of community empowerment is to increase the ability and independence of the community to improve their standard of living (general goal). In the process, the community comes together. (a) Identify and assess problems, potentials, and opportunities, (b) Prepare group activity plans based on the results of the study, (c) Implement group activity plans, (d) Monitor processes and outcomes of activities continuously (participatory monitoring and evaluation (M&EP) In

all activities, visualization techniques, and tools are often used to support discussion between the community and facilitate the empowerment process. It is hoped that the study process, activity plan preparation, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation are carried out systematically through these techniques. Study techniques are often called "Participatory Rural Appraisal" or "PRA." Monitoring and evaluation are crucial stages and intend to improve the process to achieve the objectives continuously. Aspects that are monitored and evaluated include the empowerment process's function, achievement, and impact.

#### **Stage 4. Community Independence**

Community empowerment aims to increase the quality of life for the people who live there by teaching them how to be self-sufficient. As a result, the community empowerment team's responsibility will steadily diminish until it is no longer necessary. The role of the group empowerment team's facilitators will be fulfilled by administrators or other members of the community who are judged capable. Empowering communities will take time to put into action. The process of community empowerment is ongoing. In many cases, a task can't be completed in a jiffy.

The impact of rapid community change requires PKBM management to open itself to the demands of change and seek to develop strategies that align with community changes. The system implemented by all PKBM components (target/target communities, students, educators/tutors/instructors/ resource persons, organizers and managers, and PKBM partners) must be aligned and in line. This is to ensure the same goals and objectives.

One of the PKBM components, which plays an essential role in developing PKBM, is the PKBM manager. As stipulated in the standards and procedures for implementing PKBM, PKBM managers must meet the following requirements: have a severe concern for education and community empowerment, have a high dedication to education and are responsible, have an extensive network, have technical capabilities in the field of education and community empowerment. PKBM managers will be able to develop appropriate strategies, especially to cope with any changes, if supported by a robust managerial function. Human resource management is one of the strategic functional areas that must be a manager's attention (Hatimah, 2006).

Suppose PKBM wants to develop into a professional and forward-looking PKBM. In that case, the following human resource strategies are designed to move PKBM to be more professional: recruitment and selection strategy, human resource planning strategy, training and development strategy, performance appraisal strategy, compensation strategy, and management-staff/employee strategy. Kamil & Riduwan (2009) argued that implementing the concept of a PKBM management strategy starts by carrying out a comprehensive plan. Comprehensive activity program planning, namely program planning that can anticipate varied and broad needs for the long term, using available and best sources to achieve program objectives.

Some basic strategies that can be developed in managing resources to be effective and efficient (Kamil & Riduwan, 2009), namely: (a) provide understanding through small training to learning residents, tutors, facilitators, and the community about the program to be developed and become their responsibility; (b) give complete trust to program managers, starting from planning, implementing the program to controlling and evaluating; (c) develop close and open cooperation and partnerships with specific parties or the community (community leaders) who can potentially be involved in program development and control. Where possible, with government, private parties, and other sponsors; (d) use goods, materials, and tools according to the needs of program development; (e) provide opportunities for program managers or communities to make decisions and be accountable for their choices; (f) use external finance team to control financing to be independent; (g) maximize existing PKBM resources in program development and control; (h) develop learning materials that are more thematic, local so that they are following the conditions of the community environment and the needs of learning citizens; (i) citizen participation in learning.

Management of out-of-school education is an effort to implement management functions for every activity related to out-of-school educational institutions and out-of-school education units. Activities related to out-of-school educational institutions include bureaucratic efforts to execute, foster, and develop out-of-school educational institutions (Sudjana, 1992). Specifically, Sudjana stated that the essential components of out-of-school education management include the following functions: planning, organizing, mobilizing, coaching, assessing, and developing.

Planning the PKBM program is closely related to the preparation of objectives and a series of activities to achieve the goals of the program organizing institution. Planning is related to the practice of patterns, sequences, and activities processes that will be carried out to achieve goals. After planning is done, the organizing is done. Organizing is identifying and integrating the necessary resources into the activities that will be carried out to achieve the goals set. These sources include human labour, facilities, equipment, and costs. Organizing is an effort to involve all human and non-human resources in integrated activities to achieve the goals and institutions or organizations implementing the PKBM program. During planning and organizing, mobilization plays a significant role. The function of lobbying is to realize a high level of performance and participation from each implementer involved in activities to achieve the goals that have been set. Mobilization can be done by efforts to grow and develop abilities, enthusiasm, confidence, and participation or by respecting the human values of each party involved in the management process.

### **3.2. Implementation of the Community Empowerment Program at the Community Learning Center**

Non-Formal Education units (PNF) like the Community Learning Activity Center (PKBM) are community-based and require constant innovation to give rise to newer community empowerment programs with transformative characteristics. This can become a best practice by not abandoning the attributes of local wisdom and excellence as additional values to educate while also improving people's lives (Rizka & Tamba, 2019). In implementing community empowerment, PKBM is required to develop innovative programs to manifest the existence of PKBM, which wants to be a strategic part of solving problems in the community. In overcoming various issues of community learning needs, it is not enough to rely on educational and instructional programs. Still, it is imperative to make program improvisation efforts even to program innovations based on individual and environmental potential development (Puspito et al., 2021).

Implementing community empowerment programs in PKBM is a strategic matter because the programs developed are expected to answer the community's learning needs as heterogeneous learning targets. Programs designed through PKBM institutions in the Garut district, for example, can be used as best practices to be replicated by other PKBM-PKBM so that synergy and continuity are established in solving problems in the community.

The Community Empowerment Program is an innovation of the PNF program developed by the PKBM under study, which is included in the type of service innovation because the program designed is a new program adapted to the community's learning needs. Suppose it is associated with the development of the PNF program. In that case, the program innovation that the PKBM has organized emphasizes the dimensions of entrepreneurship education with a focus on developing the potential for a creative economy-based environment and developing children's education and family education. In addition, concerning the elaboration of Law number 20 of 2003 article 26 paragraph (3), the innovations of the PNF program developed by the PKBM understudy emphasize more Skills Education, Life Skills Education, Early Childhood Education, Women's Empowerment Education, and Other education based on community needs.

The participatory strategy used in developing an innovative program in PKBM is carried out in stages; (1) PKBM managers, together with community leaders, discuss informally plans for the development of new programs based on observing local potentials and the development of community learning needs; (2) The results of the informal discussion of the program design are then continued

through communication with the PLS Inspector to obtain input and suggestions to strengthen the program design; (3) after receiving input and suggestions, the PKBM Manager begins to map out a partnership network to be able to support the implementation of the program, especially in assisting the availability of facilities, human resources, and post-implementation support; and (4) PKBM managers begin to collect data on prospective learning citizens (targets) and design the needs of other program components while still involving all elements in PKBM.

In addition to using participatory strategies, several PKBM, which are the unit of analysis in this study, also try to create other community education programs with a clear pattern or invite the community to join the program. The data analysis conducted in this study also explains that another strategy used by PKBM-PKBM to develop an innovative PNF program through a social mapping process based on identifying the community's (local) environmental potential. This strategy is used to make it easier for PKBM Managers to organize programs in attracting the motivation of prospective learning citizens and preparing program needs (because the resources needed for program implementation come from the surrounding community).

To develop PNF program innovation, there are obstacles faced by PKBM Managers, both internal and external. Based on the findings of this study, the barriers faced in developing innovative PNF programs are more about the limited ability or capacity of PKBM human resources to read the opportunities or potentials of local (community) resources to be developed into educational programs that can provide added value and improving the quality of people's lives. Furthermore, the limited ability possessed by the PKBM Manager is the ability in the managerial aspect, namely the power of the PKBM Manager to organize innovative PNF programs to be carried out with principles of quality and professionalism. In addition, there is still a lack of PKBM partners, so they are less able to discuss creative programs with prospective value.

The obstacle faced also lies in the lack of participation from community leaders to be actively involved in developing the PNF program in PKBM. The involvement of community leaders in the implementation of the PNF program in PKBM is still limited to participation in the form of morals, not yet fully able to participate in terms of brainstorming, creative ideas, and providing constructive input for the comprehensive development of the existence of PKBM. It can be seen that community leaders are a crucial part of the community who understand well the region's conditions, characteristics, local potential, and advantages so that knowledge and understanding of program development based on local benefits should be designed and implemented optimally.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

PKBM, or Community Learning Activity Center, is a forum for organizing community needs-based education, primarily aimed at low-income people who do not receive formal education in school. In its development, many PKBMs have not been optimal in carrying out various educational activities due to multiple problems PKBM both in terms of management, quality of human resources, availability of facilities, and the community environment where PKBM is located. PKBM, as one of the media for community empowerment in its implementation, will be accompanied by a community empowerment team who is very active in assisting through various stages until, finally, the community can be independent in managing the PKBM. The settings include site selection, empowerment socialization, empowerment process, and community independence.

Implementing community empowerment programs in PKBM also requires program management and innovation. PKBM managers must meet the following requirements: have a deep concern for education and community empowerment, have a high dedication to education and be responsible, have an extensive network, and have technical capabilities in education and community empowerment. The management of PKBM is closely related to planning, organizing, and, finally, the mobilization function. Meanwhile, innovative programs are required to implement community empowerment programs. Therefore, future studies are encouraged to conduct in order to find the innovation for improving the PKBM programs.

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