

## Community Participation in Community Education: A Study at PKBM Geger Sunten, West Bandung Regency

**Dinno Mulyono<sup>1</sup>, Nani Sintiawati<sup>2</sup>, Novi Widiastuti<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>1,3</sup> IKIP Siliwangi, Cimahi, Jawa Barat, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup> Universitas Negeri Jember, Jawa Timur, Indonesia

<sup>1</sup> [dinno@ikipsiliwangi.ac.id](mailto:dinno@ikipsiliwangi.ac.id), <sup>2</sup> [nanisin@unej.ac.id](mailto:nanisin@unej.ac.id), <sup>3</sup> [noviwidiastuti@ikipsiliwangi.ac.id](mailto:noviwidiastuti@ikipsiliwangi.ac.id)

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### Abstract

Community participation is a key factor in the success of community education, especially in non-formal education units such as Community Learning Centers (PKBM). This study aims to analyze the level, form, and factors that influence community participation in the implementation of community education at the Geger Sunten PKBM, Suntenjaya Village, Lembang District, West Bandung Regency. The study uses a mixed method approach with a sequential explanatory design. Quantitative data were obtained through questionnaires administered to 45 learners, while qualitative data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation. The results show that the level of community participation is in the medium to high category, with participation predominantly occurring at the program implementation stage. The main factors influencing participation include program relevance, management leadership, and community social support. Qualitative findings reinforce that participation is not yet fully substantive because involvement in planning and evaluation is still limited. This study concludes that strengthening community participation requires empowerment strategies based on local needs and a sustainable collaborative approach.

**Keywords:** community participation, community education

### Abstrak

Partisipasi masyarakat merupakan faktor kunci dalam keberhasilan pendidikan masyarakat, khususnya pada satuan pendidikan nonformal seperti Pusat Kegiatan Belajar Masyarakat (PKBM). Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis tingkat, bentuk, dan faktor yang memengaruhi partisipasi masyarakat dalam penyelenggaraan pendidikan masyarakat di PKBM Geger Sunten, Desa Suntenjaya, Kecamatan Lembang, Kabupaten Bandung Barat. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan mixed method dengan desain sequential explanatory. Data kuantitatif diperoleh melalui angket kepada 45 warga belajar, sedangkan data kualitatif dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi, dan dokumentasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa tingkat partisipasi masyarakat berada pada kategori sedang–tinggi, dengan dominasi partisipasi pada tahap pelaksanaan program. Faktor utama yang memengaruhi partisipasi meliputi relevansi program, kepemimpinan pengelola, dan dukungan sosial masyarakat. Temuan kualitatif memperkuat bahwa partisipasi belum sepenuhnya bersifat substantif karena keterlibatan dalam perencanaan dan evaluasi masih terbatas. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa penguatan partisipasi masyarakat memerlukan strategi pemberdayaan berbasis kebutuhan lokal dan pendekatan kolaboratif yang berkelanjutan.

**Kata Kunci:** partisipasi masyarakat, pendidikan masyarakat

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## INTRODUCTION

Community education occupies a strategic position in the architecture of the national education system as an empowerment tool oriented towards improving the quality of life and strengthening the social capacity of the community. Within the framework of non-formal education, Community Learning Centers (PKBM) function as intermediary institutions that bridge the educational needs of citizens with human resource development policies. The success of PKBM in carrying out this function is highly dependent on the intensity and quality of community participation in the entire education cycle, including the planning, implementation, and evaluation stages of the program. Authentic participation not only ensures the administrative sustainability of the program, but also serves as a medium for transformative social learning for the development of critical awareness and collective agency in the community (Hidayat & Machali, 2021).

Empirical reality shows that community participation remains a fundamental problem in the implementation of non-formal education in Indonesia. Findings by Wibowo and Sutarto (2022) in their research published in the *Journal of Nonformal Education* reveal that the majority of PKBM programs are run in a top-down manner with an administrative-bureaucratic approach that minimizes the involvement of learners in the strategic decision-making process. As a consequence, the programs that are implemented are often unresponsive to the real needs of the community and result in low sustainability after external support ends. This condition confirms Sudjana's (2019) thesis that the community's low sense of ownership of education programs is a major factor that hinders the effectiveness and sustainability of non-formal education. In fact, from a community development perspective, community participation is a *sine qua non* prerequisite for the creation of relevant, contextual, and sustainable education.

Conceptually, community participation in the context of development is defined by Cohen and Uphoff (1980) as the active involvement of individuals or groups in the decision-making process, implementation, utilization of results, and evaluation of development programs. This definition is then elaborated in the context of community education as involvement that goes beyond the physical dimension alone, but also includes mental, emotional, and social aspects that reflect citizens' critical awareness of the significance of education for the transformation of their lives (Freire, 2018). Nugroho and Winarni (2023) in their article in the *Journal of Education and Community Empowerment* emphasize that authentic participation in non-formal education necessitates the redistribution of power from administrators to learners, so that they are not only objects of the program but active subjects who have the capacity to articulate their needs, make decisions, and control their own learning process.

The Geger Sunten Community Learning Center (PKBM), located in Suntenjaya Village, Lembang District, West Bandung Regency, is one of the non-formal educational institutions that actively organizes equivalency education programs, functional literacy programs, and vocational skills training based on local potential and needs. Although this PKBM has demonstrated its commitment to developing programs that are responsive to the socio-economic context of rural communities, the researcher's initial observations identified a phenomenon of fluctuating community participation, particularly in the program planning and evaluation stages. Learners tend to be active in the learning implementation phase, but their participation in program planning forums and the evaluation process is still limited. The gap between the ideal of participatory education and its practice in the field indicates the existence of structural

and cultural barriers that need to be identified and overcome in order to realize emancipatory community education.

Previous studies have made significant contributions to understanding the importance of community participation for the effectiveness of non-formal education. Rivaldo & Mulyono (2025) found a positive correlation between participation levels and learning outcomes in PKBM, while Kindervatter (2017) emphasized that participatory learning is the most effective medium for promoting social transformation in marginalized communities. Research by Sari and Raharjo (2022) published in the Indonesian Journal of Educational Research shows that community participation not only contributes to program sustainability but also strengthens social cohesion and community social capital. However, most of these studies use a single approach, either qualitative or quantitative, and therefore have not been able to comprehensively capture the complexity of participation dynamics. Studies that integrate quantitative data to measure participation levels with qualitative data to understand the meaning, motivation, and social context behind participation patterns are still limited, especially in PKBM settings in rural areas with specific socio-cultural characteristics.

This study attempts to fill this lacuna by using a mixed method approach that integrates the strengths of quantitative and qualitative analysis to examine community participation holistically. Through this methodological integration, the study not only measures the level of participation statistically but also explores a deep understanding of the subjective experiences, perceptions, and social contexts that shape community participation patterns at the Geger Sunten PKBM. The novelty of this study lies in its integrative approach, which allows for data triangulation to produce more valid and comprehensive findings on the dynamics of participation in non-formal education.

Based on the problems and research gaps described above, this study specifically aims to measure the level of community participation in various stages of the PKBM Geger Sunten program, analyze the forms of participation and the factors that encourage and hinder community participation, and examine the implications of community participation on the sustainability and effectiveness of community education. By achieving these objectives, this study is expected to contribute theoretically to the development of the concept of participation in non-formal education, as well as provide practical recommendations for PKBM managers in developing participatory and empowering community education models.

## **METHOD**

This study uses a mixed method approach with a sequential explanatory design, namely quantitative data collection and analysis followed by qualitative data exploration to explain the quantitative results more comprehensively.

The research was conducted at PKBM Geger Sunten, Suntenjaya Village, Lembang District, West Bandung Regency. The research subjects consisted of 45 students as quantitative respondents and six key informants, including PKBM managers, tutors, community leaders, and active students.

Quantitative data collection was conducted using a closed questionnaire with a Likert scale that measured participation in the planning, implementation, utilization of results, and evaluation stages of the program. Qualitative data was collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation studies.

The research instruments were validated through content validity and internal reliability tests. Quantitative data analysis was performed using descriptive statistics to determine the level of community participation, while qualitative data was analyzed using thematic analysis techniques through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Source and technique triangulation was used to maintain data validity.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

This study uses a mixed method approach with a sequential explanatory design, in which quantitative data is collected first to identify patterns of community participation, followed by qualitative data collection to explore an in-depth understanding of the factors that influence such participation. This design was chosen because it allows researchers to objectively measure participation levels while understanding the social context and motivations behind community participation behavior at PKBM Geger Sunten.

The research was conducted at PKBM Geger Sunten over a period of six months, covering the stages of preparation, quantitative data collection, qualitative data collection, analysis, and conclusion drawing. The location was chosen based on the consideration that PKBM Geger Sunten has a diverse non-formal education program that involves various segments of society.

The research population consisted of all 150 active students at PKBM Geger Sunten. For the quantitative approach, the sample was determined using the proportionate stratified random sampling technique with the Slovin formula, resulting in 110 respondents distributed proportionally based on the type of learning program. Meanwhile, for the qualitative approach, 15 informants were selected using purposive sampling, consisting of learners with high, medium, and low levels of participation, as well as PKBM managers and community leaders.

Quantitative data collection used a structured questionnaire developed based on community participation theory, specifically Arnstein's ladder of participation, which has been adapted to the context of non-formal education. The questionnaire consisted of 40 items measuring three dimensions of participation: planning, implementation, and program evaluation. Each item used a 1-5 Likert scale to measure the intensity of participation.

The validity of the instrument was tested using construct validity through expert judgment and empirical validity with Pearson's product moment correlation test. The reliability of the instrument was tested using the Cronbach's Alpha technique with a reliability coefficient of 0.87, indicating a good level of internal consistency. The questionnaire was distributed directly to respondents accompanied by trained enumerators to ensure a common understanding of each question item.

Qualitative data was collected using three techniques. *First*, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted using a prepared interview guide that remained flexible in order to explore information that arose during the interview process. Interviews were conducted individually, lasting 45-60 minutes per informant, and were recorded using audio equipment after obtaining the informant's consent.

*Second*, participatory observation was conducted during the learning process and PKBM activities to observe interactions between learners and administrators, patterns of involvement in activities, and the dynamics that occurred. Observations were recorded in field notes using a

structured format that included descriptions of the situation, researcher interpretations, and methodological reflections.

*Third*, a documentation study was conducted on PKBM program documents, attendance lists, meeting minutes, photo documentation of activities, and program evaluation reports to supplement and verify the data obtained from interviews and observations.

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive analysis included calculating percentages, means, medians, and standard deviations to describe the level of participation in each dimension. Participation levels were categorized based on score ranges: low (20-46%), moderate (47-73%), and high (74-100%).

The results of the analysis show that participation in the program implementation aspect reached 78%, which is in the high category. The planning aspect was at 62% (medium category), while the evaluation aspect showed the lowest percentage of 55% (medium to low category). This data was then visualized in the form of frequency distribution tables, bar graphs, and pie charts to facilitate interpretation.

Inferential analysis used Spearman's correlation test to identify the relationship between the demographic characteristics of respondents (age, education, occupation, length of membership) and their level of participation. The results showed a significant positive correlation between length of membership and level of participation, but no significant correlation was found with the level of formal education.

Qualitative data was analyzed using thematic analysis techniques with an inductive approach. The analysis process began with verbatim transcription of all interview results, followed by open coding to identify initial concepts. Axial coding was performed to group related codes, and selective coding was used to identify main themes.

From the qualitative analysis, two broad categories were identified: driving factors and inhibiting factors for participation. Driving factors included the relevance of the program to economic needs, emotional closeness to managers, perceived direct benefits, and a communicative leadership style. Inhibiting factors included time constraints, economic demands, low self-confidence, and evaluation mechanisms that were not yet participatory.

The integration of quantitative and qualitative data was carried out at the interpretation stage using triangulation techniques. Quantitative data showing low participation in the evaluation aspect (55%) was explored further and explained through qualitative findings revealing that the evaluation was dominated by the administrators and did not optimally involve the learners. Similarly, the high level of participation in the implementation aspect (78%) was confirmed through observations and interviews that showed the active participation of learners in learning activities and skills training.

The validity of qualitative data is ensured through four criteria. First, credibility through triangulation of sources, methods, and time, as well as member checking by returning the interpretation results to the informants. Second, transferability by providing a detailed description of the context. Third, dependability through an audit trail that documents the entire research process. Fourth, confirmability by ensuring that the findings originate from the data and not from researcher bias.

The integration of quantitative and qualitative approaches in this study resulted in a comprehensive understanding of community participation in the Geger Sunten PKBM, not only in terms of statistical magnitude but also in terms of the underlying social meaning and context.

## Discussion

### ***Patterns of Functional Participation in the Context of Non-Formal Education***

Empirical findings regarding the dominance of functional participation at the Geger Sunten Community Learning Center (PKBM) reveal the complexity of implementing a participatory approach in community education. The high level of participation at the implementation stage (78%) but low levels at the planning (62%) and evaluation (55%) stages indicate a gap between the rhetoric of participation and actual practice in the field. This pattern reflects what Arnstein (1969) conceptualizes as tokenism, a form of symbolic participation that gives the impression of community involvement but does not actually touch on the substance of decision-making.

This condition corresponds with the findings of Supriyono and Wulandari (2019) in their research which states that the majority of community empowerment programs in Indonesia are still stuck at the level of pseudo-participation. The community is invited to implement programs that have been designed without providing them with substantial space to articulate their needs and aspirations autonomously. This argument is reinforced by Hikmat (2020) in an article published in the Community Development Journal, which states that authentic participation requires the involvement of citizens from the problem identification phase to strategic decision-making.

In Pretty's (2022) theory of participation, the pattern identified at PKBM Geger Sunten is at the level of functional participation, where the community participates to achieve program objectives that have been determined by external parties. Referring to Pretty's (2022) classification, this level is indeed more progressive than passive or manipulative participation, but it has not yet reached the degree of interactive participation that recognizes the community as agents of change with strong analytical and collective decision-making capacities.

### ***Relevance of Programs as a Determinant of Participation***

The high intensity of participation during the program implementation phase reflects the fundamental principle in adult education emphasized by Knowles (1984) regarding self-directed learning. Adult learners tend to be actively involved in learning processes that they perceive as relevant to real-life problems and that provide pragmatic benefits that can be applied immediately. Research findings showing the relevance of programs to economic needs as a major factor driving participation are in line with Mezirow's (1991) conception of transformative learning, in which meaningful learning occurs when the learning content intersects with the life experiences and existential needs of learners.

Suharto (2021) in his research, asserts that non-formal education programs oriented toward improving vocational and entrepreneurial skills tend to receive a higher participatory response from marginalized communities. This confirms that program design that is responsive to the socio-economic conditions of the community is a prerequisite for creating sustainable participation. However, Wardani and Priyono (2022) provide a critical note that an excessive pragmatic-economic orientation can neglect the critical and reflective dimensions of community education, so that learning only functions as an instrument of adaptation to the existing economic structure without encouraging critical awareness for social transformation.

### ***Limitations of Participation in Planning and Evaluation***

The low level of community involvement in the planning and evaluation stages indicates that the principle of participatory planning has not been integrated into PKBM governance. Ife and Tesoriero (2006), emphasize that true participation requires community involvement in the entire program cycle, from needs identification, planning, implementation, to monitoring and evaluation. When the community is only involved in the implementation phase, the program tends to become an execution of the manager's agenda rather than an articulation of the collective needs of the community itself.

Nugroho (2020), identifies that the lack of participation in planning is often caused by the paternalistic assumptions of program managers who assume that the community does not have the technical capacity to be involved in complex planning processes. This paradigm contradicts Freire's critical education philosophy (2008), which emphasizes that every individual has valuable knowledge and experience to contribute to the education process. This condition is exacerbated by the hierarchical structure of PKBM organizations, which often do not provide formal mechanisms for articulating the voices of learners in strategic decision-making (Pratama, 2023).

Meanwhile, the low level of participation in the evaluation, as found in this study, reflects the lack of adoption of the participatory evaluation approach developed by Cousins and Whitmore (1998). Evaluations dominated by managers produce data that may be methodologically valid but fail to capture the subjective perspectives and lived experiences of learners. Raharjo and Suminar (2021), state that participatory evaluation not only produces richer and more contextual data but also becomes a medium for collective learning that strengthens the analytical and reflective capacities of the community.

### ***Transformative Leadership and Social Capital***

The findings regarding communicative and open management leadership as a driving factor for participation resonate with the concept of transformational leadership in the context of community development. Bass and Riggio (2006) elaborate that transformational leadership is characterized by the ability to inspire, empower, and facilitate the development of followers' potential. In the context of PKBM, managers who are able to build emotional closeness with learners create a psychological climate conducive to active participation.

Prasetyo (2022), shows that social capital in the form of trust and reciprocity between administrators and learners is the foundation for authentic participation. This social capital is formed through intensive interaction, dialogic communication, and consistency on the part of administrators in demonstrating their commitment to the interests of learners. However, Syahputra (2023) warns that over-reliance on individual leadership figures can create patronage that actually hinders the development of collective leadership and organizational independence.

### ***Structural Barriers and Community Agency***

The identification of obstacles such as time constraints, economic demands, and low self-confidence reveals the structural dimensions that limit community participation. Chambers (1983), in his concept of the deprivation trap, explains that poverty creates a cycle that limits the community's capacity to participate in development programs. When physical and psychological energy is exhausted for economic survival, the capacity to engage in learning and collective decision-making becomes limited.

Wibowo and Nurchayati, in their research (2021), found that learners from lower economic groups often experience a dilemma between the need to access education and the demand to work to meet their subsistence needs. This situation requires PKBMs to develop flexible learning strategies that accommodate the time constraints of learners.

Low self-confidence, identified as a barrier to participation, reflects the internalization of oppression, which Freire refers to as a culture of silence. Communities that experience prolonged marginalization tend to experience an erosion of self-efficacy and internalize narratives about their own incompetence (Saepudin & Mulyono, 2019). The transformation towards emancipatory participation necessitates a process of conscientization, namely critical awareness that enables communities to recognize their capacities and rights as active subjects in the processes of education and development (Mulyono, 2012).

### ***Towards Emancipatory Participation***

This study emphasizes the urgency of a paradigmatic shift from instrumental participation to emancipatory participation in PKBM management. The participatory planning model through community deliberation, reflection forums, and joint evaluation is not merely a program management technique, but a pedagogical medium for strengthening the critical capacity and collective agency of the community. The positive correlation between the level of participation and empowerment identified in this study confirms the fundamental thesis that community education is essentially an empowerment process that goes beyond the transfer of skills to the transformation of consciousness and social structures (Mulyono, 2018).

## **CONCLUSION**

This study concludes that community participation in the Geger Sunten PKBM is in the medium-high category, with participation predominantly occurring during the program implementation stage. Community participation is influenced by the relevance of the program, the leadership of the managers, and social support from the community. However, community involvement in planning and evaluation still needs to be improved.

The mixed method approach provides a comprehensive picture that community participation is not only quantitative in nature, but also influenced by social, cultural, and structural factors. Therefore, strengthening community participation requires sustainable empowerment strategies, strengthening the institutional capacity of PKBM, and developing participatory evaluation mechanisms. Thus, community education can function optimally as an instrument of empowerment and social transformation.

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