Leadership Dynamics and Organizational Advancement in Non-Formal Education: A Case Study of PKBM Karya Manunggal

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Article Info	Abstract
	Purpose – This study examines leadership practices at PKBM Karya Manunggal to understand how leadership influences the success of non-formal education institutions. **Design/methods** – A qualitative case study approach was used, employing in-depth semi-structured interviews with the head of the institution. Data were analyzed thematically, and member checking was applied to ensure data validity and reliability. **Findings** – Inclusive and participatory leadership practices contributed to operational development, improved facilities, increased student enrollment to 78, and graduate success, despite challenges such as low student engagement, accreditation difficulties, and limited tutor involvement. **Research implications/limitations** – The focus on a single institution limits the generalizability of the results, suggesting the need for broader comparative studies across non-formal education centers. **Practical implications** – The findings highlight the importance of professional development, technological integration, curriculum enhancement, community engagement, and alumni network development to strengthen institutional sustainability. **Originality/value** – This study offers original insights into leadership strategies in Indonesian non-formal education and provides actionable recommendations for strengthening educational equity and institutional resilience.

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Introduction

Non-formal education plays an increasingly essential role in bridging educational gaps, especially for marginalized populations who are often left out of formal systems. In many regions, this form of education provides not only basic literacy but also opportunities for social and economic advancement (Biao, 2015; Mpofu, 2015). Community-based learning centers like PKBM Karya Manunggal offer valuable educational services that are adapted to local needs and realities. However, despite its critical role, non-formal education continues to face challenges related to funding, infrastructure, and learner engagement (Selby et al., 2020). These persistent issues highlight the importance of effective leadership in ensuring the sustainability and growth of such educational initiatives.

Existing research underlines the importance of leadership models that emphasize vision-building, empowerment, and motivation. Transformational leadership, for instance, has been linked to improved educational outcomes by fostering a strong collective purpose (Blegur et al., 2024). In the non-formal education sector, leaders are expected not only to manage operational aspects but also to inspire their teams and communities. Collaborative and participative leadership styles have been shown to enhance decision-making quality and stakeholder commitment (García-Rodríguez et al., 2025). This suggests that leadership effectiveness in non-formal education extends beyond administrative capability to encompass strategic engagement with all members of the learning ecosystem.

Several studies have also emphasized the cultural and contextual adaptability of leadership in non-formal education. In Bangladesh, for instance, leadership by women has played a pivotal role in transforming traditional norms and promoting social change (Sperandio, 2011). Similarly, school leaders in multicultural regions like the southern Philippines have demonstrated the need for religiously sensitive leadership approaches (Brooks, 2017). These findings align with the broader understanding that non-formal education leadership must navigate social, economic, and political intricacies to be effective. Moreover, integrating local cultural values into educational practices has been shown to strengthen learner identity and community support (Agus et al., 2021).

Leadership in non-formal education is also shaped by the diverse learning experiences of its practitioners. Research shows that leaders often develop their skills through a combination of formal training, informal mentoring, and on-the-job experiences (Donitsa-Schmidt & Zuzovsky, 2020; Hulsbos et al., 2016). Distributed leadership models, where authority is shared across various stakeholders, have gained attention for their potential to democratize institutional management (García-Rodríguez et al., 2025). In many cases, effective leadership correlates closely with the ability to foster professional collaboration and collective responsibility. These dynamics are particularly relevant in resource-constrained environments where innovation and resilience are essential.

Furthermore, leaders who promote pedagogical innovation tend to achieve greater success in non-formal education settings. Programs that blend formal and non-formal learning strategies have demonstrated significant benefits, particularly in building critical thinking and problem-solving skills among learners (Cantlon et al., 2024). Community-based educational models, which emphasize active learner participation and local relevance, have also shown promise (Edralin et al., 2015; Farias et al., 2023). Such approaches not only enhance educational outcomes but also foster a deeper connection between learning institutions and the communities they serve. Therefore, leadership that is open to curricular and methodological innovation is crucial for advancing non-formal education.

While the literature provides valuable insights into leadership in non-formal education, there remains a notable lack of institution-specific case studies within the Indonesian context. Many existing analyses generalize findings without accounting for unique cultural, economic, and organizational realities faced by local PKBM institutions (Wulandari et al., 2019; Zakso et al., 2021). There is also limited discussion on how leaders manage the dual pressures of daily operations and long-term development planning, particularly under resource constraints

(Goodman & Grosvenor, 2010; Triezenberg et al., 2023). Furthermore, previous studies often overlook the strategies leaders use to sustain community engagement over extended periods. This study addresses these gaps by focusing specifically on leadership practices at PKBM Karya Manunggal.

The aim of this study is to explore leadership practices at PKBM Karya Manunggal, focusing on leadership characteristics, institutional achievements, operational challenges, and management strategies. By examining the leadership of Sumardiyono, the head of the institution, the study seeks to understand how collaboration, innovation, and sustainability are operationalized within a non-formal education context. This research contributes to the academic discourse by offering empirical evidence from a grassroots educational setting, providing insights that can inform leadership development programs in similar institutions (Suryono et al., 2022; Wei & Larsen, 2023). The findings are expected to have practical implications for policymakers, educators, and non-formal education leaders aiming to strengthen the sector. Ultimately, the study aspires to promote more effective leadership models that are context-sensitive, inclusive, and community-driven.

Methods

This study utilized a qualitative approach with a case study method to investigate leadership dynamics, achievements, challenges, and management strategies within the context of non-formal education at PKBM Karya Manunggal. Data were collected through an in-depth interview with Sumardiyono, who has led PKBM Karya Manunggal for seven years, focusing on his experiences, perspectives, and strategies in managing the institution. The interview was conducted using a semi-structured format to allow for the exploration of both predetermined topics and emergent issues relevant to leadership and organizational management. Audio recordings of the interviews were made with the participant's consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim to ensure data fidelity. Data analysis was performed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and major themes related to leadership practices and operational challenges, enabling a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. To ensure the study's reliability and validity, strategies such as member checking were employed, whereby preliminary interpretations were verified by the participant to confirm accuracy. Ethical considerations included obtaining informed consent, ensuring participant confidentiality, and adhering strictly to ethical research protocols. The focus of this study was specifically directed towards capturing the unique leadership practices, success factors, and management strategies within the non-formal education environment of Indonesia, particularly as manifested in the operational dynamics of PKBM Karya Manunggal.

Results

1. Leadership Characteristics and Achievements

The leadership at PKBM Karya Manunggal is exemplified by Mr. Sumardiyono, who has been serving as the Head for the past seven years after previously leading the foundation. At 71 years old, with an educational background equivalent to senior high school, he assumed the leadership role through a deliberative consensus among members due to the absence of other candidates. Mr. Sumardiyono perceives leadership responsibilities as encompassing team management, decision-making processes, and the alignment of the organization's vision and mission with its operational goals. His leadership style emphasizes inclusiveness and cooperation, ensuring that all management members, including the secretariat, treasurer, and tutors, actively participate in organizational governance. The shift from the title "Chairman" to "Head" also reflects an institutional transition towards greater authority and accountability.

During his tenure, Mr. Sumardiyono has led PKBM Karya Manunggal to achieve significant milestones, particularly in operational development and student growth. The major achievements during his leadership period are summarized in Table 1. These achievements

demonstrate the institution's progress in enhancing its resources, expanding access to non-formal education, and producing successful graduates.

Table 1. Achievements of PKBM Karya Manunggal During the Leadership of Mr. Sumardiyono

No	Achievement	Description
1	Operational Development Fund (POB) Acquisition	PKBM succeeded in obtaining POB funding after previously failing to meet the minimum student requirement.
2	Enhancement of Learning Facilities	Acquisition of laptops, LCD projectors, whiteboards, desks, and chairs to support teaching and learning activities.
3	Increase in Student Enrollment	The number of registered students grew to 78, compared to a previously lower enrollment.
4	Successful Graduates	Several alumni pursued higher education at state and private universities and gained employment in public and private sectors.

The acquisition of the Operational Development Fund (POB) marks a crucial advancement, as PKBM had initially struggled to qualify due to a limited number of students. With strategic recruitment efforts and the establishment of better facilities, the center expanded its reach and appeal to the community. The provision of technological resources, such as laptops and projectors, has significantly improved the quality of the learning experience and prepared students for technology-based assessments.

Moreover, the increase in student enrollment demonstrates the growing trust of the local community in the institution's educational offerings. The success of PKBM's graduates, who have been able to continue their studies or secure employment, serves as a strong indicator of the organization's effectiveness in delivering non-formal education that meets both academic and vocational aspirations.

2. Challenges and Decision-Making Strategies

Despite the notable achievements, PKBM Karya Manunggal has encountered multiple challenges during its organizational development. The main challenges faced by the institution are outlined in Table 2. These obstacles highlight the complexities of managing a non-formal education center, particularly in relation to student engagement, administrative compliance, and staff performance.

Table 2. Challenges Faced by PKBM Karya Manunggal

No	Challenge	Supporting Factors
1	Lack of Student Participation	Many students come from dropout backgrounds and face personal issues affecting their engagement.
2	Administrative and Accreditation Barriers	Difficulties in fulfilling administrative and accreditation requirements due to resource limitations.
3	Limited Tutor Engagement	Tutors sometimes struggle to maintain effective relationships with students, impacting the learning atmosphere.

One of the most significant challenges identified is the low level of student participation. Many learners originate from dropout backgrounds and encounter personal or social difficulties, which hinder their active engagement in educational activities. Even after enrollment, several students exhibit low levels of commitment, requiring additional intervention efforts from the management team. Personalized approaches and increased parental involvement have been employed to address this issue, although sustaining student motivation remains a persistent difficulty.

Tutor engagement presents another notable challenge. Although PKBM employs qualified tutors, not all of them consistently foster positive interactions with students. Building an enjoyable and productive learning environment is particularly critical in non-formal education settings where student backgrounds are diverse and often vulnerable. Insufficient tutor involvement may compromise the effectiveness of instructional delivery and student satisfaction.

Furthermore, the institution faces considerable administrative and accreditation barriers. Meeting accreditation standards necessitates comprehensive documentation and systemic compliance, which are challenging due to limited human and financial resources. The administrative burdens have placed additional pressure on the management team to continually enhance organizational readiness and fulfill governmental regulatory requirements. Despite these hurdles, the leadership team remains committed to improving compliance and seeking opportunities for institutional growth.

The decision-making strategy employed at PKBM Karya Manunggal is participative and deliberative. Although the Head holds ultimate authority, decision-making processes involve active consultation with secretariat members, treasurers, and tutors. Major decisions, including those related to tutor remuneration and curricular arrangements, are deliberated collectively before final endorsement. This approach has fostered a sense of collective ownership and accountability among the staff, enhancing organizational cohesion and operational effectiveness.

Assignments for tutors are determined based on individual competencies and character traits to ensure optimal task distribution. This tailored assignment strategy has improved organizational dynamics by aligning responsibilities with each tutor's specific strengths. Consequently, the environment becomes more conducive to both teaching and learning, supporting the overall mission of the PKBM to deliver high-quality non-formal education.

3. *Future Prospects for Organizational Development*

The leadership experience at PKBM Karya Manunggal provides valuable insights into strategies for enhancing non-formal education centers in the future. Although the institution has faced substantial challenges, the achievements realized during Mr. Sumardiyono's tenure affirm that continuous improvement and strategic leadership can drive meaningful progress. Building upon the foundations already established, PKBM has significant potential to further strengthen its educational impact within the community.

One critical area for future development is the professional capacity of management staff and tutors. Improving the competencies of tutors, particularly in pedagogical skills and student engagement techniques, would directly address some of the persistent challenges faced during the learning process. Targeted professional development programs and structured performance evaluations could support tutors in creating more dynamic and student-centered learning environments, which are essential for maximizing educational outcomes in non-formal settings.

Additionally, curriculum development must evolve to align more closely with labor market demands and contemporary societal needs. By integrating vocational skills, digital literacy, and life skills into the curriculum, PKBM Karya Manunggal can better prepare its students for higher education pathways and employment opportunities. Such an approach would not only enhance the relevance of the educational offerings but also increase the attractiveness of the institution to prospective students, further boosting enrollment and community support.

Technological integration represents another strategic avenue for organizational advancement. Leveraging digital platforms for learning delivery, administrative management, and communication can improve operational efficiency and expand educational access. Especially in the post-pandemic context, the ability to offer blended learning modalities could position PKBM Karya Manunggal as a more resilient and innovative institution capable of adapting to changing educational landscapes.

Finally, the success of graduates in pursuing higher education or securing employment should be systematically tracked and utilized as a key performance indicator for program evaluation. Developing a structured alumni network could serve dual purposes: providing feedback on curriculum relevance and fostering mentorship opportunities for current students. This feedback loop would contribute to a culture of continuous improvement and demonstrate the institution's commitment to measurable educational impact.

Discussion

Leadership in non-formal education plays a crucial role in addressing educational disparities for marginalized populations, where formal systems often fall short (Blegur et al., 2024). Institutions like PKBM Karya Manunggal offer a compelling example of how leadership initiatives can transform access and outcomes in alternative education pathways. Beyond administrative management, leadership in these contexts must extend into community engagement and participatory governance, blending flexibility with responsiveness to local needs (Marliyani et al., 2023; Ualiyeva et al., 2024). This study focuses on how leadership characteristics, achievements, and strategies at PKBM Karya Manunggal have contributed to sustaining its educational mission within a resource-limited environment.

Throughout the analysis, it becomes evident that inclusivity and collaboration have significantly shaped PKBM's institutional growth. The successful acquisition of an Operational Development Fund, following earlier setbacks, points to strategic organizational adaptation (Sperandio, 2011). Upgrades like laptops and projectors have modernized the learning environment, boosting both student motivation and educational quality (Donitsa-Schmidt & Zuzovsky, 2020; Indra et al., 2022). Remarkably, these gains were achieved despite

the Head's limited formal education, challenging conventional assumptions about leadership credentials and reaffirming the value of adaptive strategies within constrained environments.

Nonetheless, PKBM's journey has not been without hurdles. Student engagement continues to pose challenges, particularly for those with previous dropout experiences, whose social and emotional barriers are deeply rooted (Masry-Herzallah, 2023; Stewart, 2011). Similarly, tutor participation remains inconsistent, undermining the continuity of the learning environment (Wei & Larsen, 2023). Administrative and accreditation demands also stretch the organization's limited resources (Klein, 2018; Skard, 2004), revealing vulnerabilities that echo structural issues faced by many non-formal education centers worldwide.

Amid these realities, PKBM has demonstrated resilience through strategic organizational adaptations. By transitioning leadership titles and promoting participatory decision-making, the institution fostered a culture of collective responsibility that strengthened internal cohesion (Stubbs et al., 2003). Building trust with the community and tracking graduate outcomes have further solidified its role, while technology integration has bridged gaps toward contemporary educational standards (Clarence et al., 2021; Martone, 2010). These shifts underscore the importance of leadership innovation in maintaining institutional relevance and credibility.

Rather than standing apart, PKBM's experience resonates with broader observations about non-formal education leadership. Participative and community-centered leadership emerges consistently as a catalyst for success (Agus et al., 2021; Farias et al., 2023), with collaboration and collective ownership frequently cited as driving forces (Brooks, 2017; Frolova et al., 2019). However, the organization's ongoing struggle with administrative compliance contrasts with settings where external support systems alleviate operational burdens (Malachias et al., 2020), suggesting that internal innovation, while critical, cannot entirely offset systemic challenges.

This narrative also challenges assumptions about leadership qualifications. PKBM's case illustrates that formal education is not the sole pathway to effective leadership, affirming the relevance of experiential knowledge and contextual intelligence within grassroots educational models (Biao, 2015; García-Rodríguez et al., 2025; Latchem & Jung, 2009). Yet, the persistent problem of student disengagement, a common thread across many non-formal initiatives (Goodman & Grosvenor, 2010; Hulsbos et al., 2016), reminds us that leadership efforts must be supplemented with targeted socio-emotional support to fully realize institutional goals.

Several contextual factors appear to have contributed to PKBM's achievements. Inclusive leadership, task alignment, and an emphasis on technology likely enhanced operational effectiveness (De Passos & Pieruccini, 2016; Zakso et al., 2021). However, caution is necessary when generalizing these strategies, as the success of PKBM is tightly interwoven with its specific sociocultural environment (Selby et al., 2020; Valverde-Berrocoso et al., 2023). Broader investigations into diverse non-formal institutions could provide valuable insights into the conditions under which such leadership models flourish.

In practical terms, this study highlights several important implications. Leadership in non-formal education must embrace community integration, ongoing professional development, and strategic technology adoption to remain sustainable (Cantlon et al., 2024). Equally, policymakers should work to reduce administrative burdens and strengthen support systems for small institutions (Limage, 2007; Ualiyeva et al., 2024). Building structured alumni networks could further enhance institutional accountability and community linkages (Harrison, 2023; Wulandari et al., 2019). Ultimately, adaptive and participatory leadership will be essential for reinforcing the role of non-formal education in promoting broader educational equity (Vergara et al., 2020; Wallace, 1992).

Conclusion

This study aimed to explore leadership practices at PKBM Karya Manunggal by analyzing leadership characteristics, institutional achievements, operational challenges, and management strategies within the context of non-formal education. The findings revealed that Mr. Sumardiyono's inclusive and participatory leadership successfully enhanced operational development, improved learning facilities, increased student enrollment, and contributed to graduate success, despite persistent challenges such as low student participation, administrative barriers, and limited tutor engagement. These results imply that effective leadership in non-formal education requires a strong emphasis on community integration, continuous professional development, curriculum responsiveness to societal needs, strategic technological adoption, and structured alumni engagement to sustain institutional growth and educational impact. However, the study's limitation lies in its single-institution focus, restricting the generalizability of its conclusions across broader contexts. Future research should undertake comparative and longitudinal analyses to assess the durability of leadership strategies and their broader applicability in advancing the sustainability and effectiveness of non-formal education institutions.

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