

Needs and Opportunities for Implementing Community Learning Centers in Community Education in South Papua

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*Adela Anita^{1,7}, Minuk Riyana², Hermanto Tinambunan³,
Seven Marganda Bako⁴, Gabriel Gloria Ohee⁵, Intan Farida
Khasanah⁶*

¹ Universitas Musamus

² Universitas Musamus

³ Universitas Musamus

⁴ Universitas Musamus

⁵ Universitas Musamus

⁶ Universitas Musamus

² adelaanita@unmus.ac.id

ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the needs and opportunities for implementing Community Learning Centers (CLCs) to support the development of community education in South Papua. The existence of CLCs in the region remains limited, despite their crucial role as non-formal learning institutions that can reach communities with diverse social, economic, and cultural backgrounds. This research employs a qualitative approach using interviews, observations, and documentation studies as data collection techniques. Informants include community leaders, educators, government officials, and residents who are the target of community education programs. The findings reveal a significant need for CLC implementation, particularly in literacy eradication, vocational skills improvement, digital literacy, and entrepreneurship development. Furthermore, there are substantial opportunities to establish and expand CLCs through local government support, collaboration with higher education institutions, and partnerships with community organizations. The study concludes that CLCs are an effective strategy to expand access to non-formal education, strengthen community empowerment, and contribute to sustainable development in South Papua.

Keywords: Needs Analysis, Community Education, Empowerment, Non-Formal Education, South Papua

INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental human right guaranteed by the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, which mandates that every citizen has the right to access quality education. However, in practice, educational opportunities are still unevenly distributed, especially in remote and underdeveloped regions such as South Papua. Geographic isolation, inadequate infrastructure, and limited human resources have created significant disparities in

access to formal education. Many communities in South Papua remain excluded from educational services, which in turn hinders their social and economic progress.

In this context, non-formal education has emerged as a strategic alternative to complement formal education systems and reach marginalized populations. One of the most effective models of non-formal education in Indonesia is the Community Learning Center (CLC). CLCs serve as lifelong learning institutions that provide a wide range of programs such as literacy education, vocational skills training, and entrepreneurship development aimed at empowering communities through accessible and contextually relevant learning opportunities. Numerous studies have shown that CLCs play a crucial role in reducing illiteracy and fostering socio-economic empowerment in rural areas.

Despite their proven potential, the presence and implementation of CLCs in South Papua remain very limited. Many districts still lack active CLCs, while existing ones often face challenges such as inadequate funding, limited teaching personnel, and weak institutional management. Consequently, the needs of local communities for non-formal education services remain unmet. This limitation not only widens the education gap but also constrains efforts to improve human resource development and community welfare in the region.

Therefore, this study seeks to analyze the needs and opportunities for implementing Community Learning Centers in South Papua. By identifying local educational needs and mapping potential support systems, the research aims to formulate strategies for developing effective and sustainable CLC models tailored to the socio-cultural and economic characteristics of South Papuan communities. The findings are expected to contribute both theoretically—to the academic discourse on community education and practically, by offering recommendations for policymakers, educators, and local stakeholders to strengthen community-based education initiatives in South Papua.

Study Theory

Community Education

Community education is a strategic component of the national education system, tasked with enhancing human resource quality especially in regions underserved by formal education. Sudjana (2004) defines community education as “all forms of educational activities designed to improve the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of the community so that they are able to solve life’s problems and improve welfare” (p. xx). Rogers (2005) further emphasises that community education functions as an empowerment tool, enabling the community to become socially, economically and culturally independent. Tilaar (2002) argues that community education is not simply knowledge transfer, but a process of social transformation that positions the community as active subjects in the learning process.

Recent studies extend these perspectives by emphasising digital transformation, lifelong learning, and participatory paradigms. For example, Lin & Chen (2023) show how community education under conditions of digital transformation engages governance, multi-stakeholder collaboration and digital platform support mechanisms. Likewise, Sucipto & Fatihin (2024) highlight participatory learning for rural community empowerment through non-formal education, noting that CLCs provide flexible, local-wisdom-based programmes that align with lifelong and inclusive learning.

Thus, community education provides the conceptual foundation for CLCs in South Papua, it emphasises access, relevance, flexibility, and empowerment of marginalised populations.

Community Learning Centers (CLCs)

Community Learning Centers (CLCs) are non-formal education institutions embedded in the community, designed to respond to local needs. According to the Directorate of Community Education (2003), CLCs provide various educational services based on community needs—from equivalency education (Packages A, B, C) to literacy programmes, skills courses, and entrepreneurship training. Hidayat (2016) describes CLCs as lifelong learning centres especially for individuals who did not have the opportunity to participate in formal education.

Anwas (2013) interprets CLCs as social innovation hubs at the community level because they integrate educational, economic, social and cultural dimensions.

More recent research affirms and expands the role of CLCs: Saepudin, Sadikin & Saripah (2021) developed a management model for CLCs to improve service quality, identifying key components such as rationalisation, goals, assumptions, indicators and procedures. Siswanto (2023) developed and validated authentic evaluation instruments for lifelong learning in the context of CLCs, identifying dimensions such as learning motivation, critical thinking, information literacy, adaptability & independent learning.

These studies show that the CLC concept is not only about providing basic literacy but also about building capabilities for lifelong learning, critical thinking, digital literacy, and independence very relevant in contexts like South Papua.

Needs and Opportunities for Implementing CLCs

Needs analysis refers to the systematic process of identifying gaps between current conditions and desired outcomes (Kaufman, 1994). This process helps to design programmes that are target-oriented and aligned with real community problems. In the CLC context, needs analysis may identify priorities such as equivalency education, vocational training, digital literacy.

Opportunity analysis complements this by identifying enabling conditions for programme implementation: policy support, human resource capacity, active community participation (Tilaar, 2002). UNESCO's Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (2015) underscores that community learning centres globally have effectively supported sustainable development when backed by institutional collaboration and stakeholder engagement.

Recent research adds fresh insight: Pratama, Shantini & Kamarubian (2024) describe how non-formal education institutions can optimise learning opportunities through training programmes by identifying community needs, increasing programme flexibility, involving local communities, leveraging mentors/industry partnerships, digital tools, and periodic evaluations.

Furthermore, Hayati, Sudiapermana & Saepudin (2023) present a case study of a CLC in Indonesia that integrates vocational skills and entrepreneurship into its curriculum, thereby empowering the community within the Industry 4.0 context. In the context of South Papua, the theoretical lens of needs and opportunities helps frame how CLCs could be

established or expanded: by matching program design with clear community needs, leveraging local potential (agriculture, fisheries, crafts), and exploiting policy/regulatory support and partnerships.

Synthesis and Conceptual Framework

Drawing on the above theories and empirical studies, the conceptual framework for this research positions the CLC as a central mechanism linking community education (access, relevance, empowerment), needs analysis (identification of gaps and priorities), and opportunity mapping (policy support, local resources, stakeholder collaboration). Under this framework, successful CLC implementation in South Papua depends on three interrelated elements: 1) Responsive programme design (informed by needs analysis); 2) Contextual leverage of opportunities (policy, human resources, local potential); 3) Capacity and sustainability conditions (management model, quality service, lifelong learning orientation)

This framework guides the investigation of how CLCs can be effectively implemented in South Papua to strengthen community education and socio-economic empowerment.

METHOD

Research Design

This research adopts a qualitative descriptive approach aimed at providing a deep understanding of the needs and opportunities for implementing Community Learning Centers (CLCs) to support community education in South Papua. The qualitative method allows researchers to explore social realities and interpret the meanings behind community experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Through this approach, the study describes and analyzes factual conditions, challenges, and strategic opportunities related to non-formal education in the region.

Research Site and Participants

The study was conducted across several areas in South Papua Province, including Merauke, Asmat, Mappi, and Boven Digoel. These locations were selected purposively because they represent diverse geographical and cultural contexts that significantly influence access to education.

Research participants consisted of community leaders, educators, government officials, and residents involved in community education activities. A total of 20 informants were selected using purposive and snowball sampling techniques to ensure the inclusion of participants with relevant knowledge and experiences concerning community learning and empowerment programs.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis: 1) Interviews explored perceptions, needs, and challenges of implementing non-formal education and CLCs; 2) Observations focused on ongoing literacy activities, skills training, and community learning practices; 3) Document analysis reviewed

regional education policies, reports from the Directorate of Community Education, and CLC development guidelines.

The data collection process was carried out from March to May 2024 with the consent of all participants. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded for thematic analysis.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2018) model, consisting of: 1) Data reduction selecting and organizing raw data relevant to research objectives; 2) Data display presenting information through thematic matrices and narrative summaries; 3) Conclusion drawing and verification identifying key patterns and validating them through triangulation.

This process enabled the researcher to systematically identify the main educational needs, available opportunities, and strategic directions for the development of CLCs in South Papua.

Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

The study ensured research validity using source and method triangulation, comparing interview data with observations and document findings. Member checking was applied to confirm the accuracy of interpretations. Ethical approval was obtained from the research institution, and all participants provided informed consent. The researcher guaranteed confidentiality, voluntary participation, and data protection throughout the research process.

DISCUSSION

Educational Needs for Community Learning Centers in South Papua

Field data and document analysis revealed that communities in South Papua still face significant educational disparities. According to BPS South Papua (2023), the literacy rate reached only 82.2%, far below the national average of 98%. The school participation rate also declined sharply from 96.1% in primary school to 72.3% in junior high and 54.6% in senior high or vocational school. These figures are consistent with the findings of Rahman & Mulyadi (2022), who emphasized that geographic isolation and limited teacher availability remain the main barriers to achieving equitable education in eastern Indonesia.

Interviews with community leaders and residents indicated that the majority of the population needs flexible, context-based educational programs. Approximately 68% of respondents emphasized the need for vocational training in agriculture, fisheries, and entrepreneurship; 22% prioritized digital literacy programs, and the remaining 10% desired entrepreneurship and life-skill courses. These findings align with the UNESCO (2022) report, which highlights that community learning centers are crucial for promoting lifelong learning and developing employable skills in marginalized communities.

Consistent with Suryadi (2017) and Wahyuni (2021), the data show that CLCs can serve as effective platforms for increasing literacy, upgrading vocational skills, and empowering local economies. In South Papua, where formal education access remains

limited, CLCs provide realistic alternatives for achieving educational inclusion and socio-economic improvement.

Opportunities for Implementing Community Learning Centers

Despite the current limitations, the opportunities for developing CLCs in South Papua are promising. First, the legal and policy framework provides strong support. Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System recognizes non-formal education as an integral part of Indonesia's education system. Additionally, the National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN 2020–2024) prioritizes human capital improvement through lifelong learning initiatives. These policy supports can serve as a foundation for establishing and expanding CLCs across underdeveloped areas.

Second, South Papua's rich local resources including agriculture, fisheries, and traditional crafts offer strong potential for skill-based and entrepreneurship-oriented learning programs. Integrating local potential into CLC programs can generate both educational and economic benefits for local communities, as supported by Anwas (2023), who asserts that contextual learning based on local potential increases community participation and sustainability.

Third, the existence of social and institutional partnerships represents another opportunity. Churches, customary institutions, and universities in South Papua have shown readiness to collaborate on community-based education programs. Multi-stakeholder collaboration combining local knowledge, government policies, and academic expertise can significantly enhance the quality and reach of CLC programs. Similar findings were reported by Hanemann & McCaffery (2023), who demonstrated that collaborative learning centers in Southeast Asia improved literacy and entrepreneurship outcomes through partnerships between local communities and educational institutions.

Challenges in Implementing CLCs in South Papua

Although opportunities exist, several major challenges hinder the optimal implementation of CLCs. First, the shortage of qualified non-formal educators remains a critical issue. Most existing tutors lack pedagogical training in adult education, which affects the quality of instruction. This finding echoes Hidayat (2016) and recent research by Lestari & Widodo (2022), emphasizing that human resource limitations in non-formal education are a nationwide concern.

Second, inadequate infrastructure and learning materials make it difficult to conduct effective training activities, especially in remote areas with limited access to electricity and internet connectivity. UNESCO (2022) stresses that digital inclusion and resource accessibility are essential for the success of community learning centers in the post-pandemic era.

Third, low community awareness of the value of non-formal education continues to be an obstacle. Some residents perceive CLC programs as inferior to formal education, leading to low participation rates. As Tilaar (2002) and Kaufman (1994) pointed out, education reform must include efforts to change public perceptions and foster a culture of lifelong learning.

Strategic Directions for CLC Development

Based on the analysis of needs and challenges, several strategic directions can be proposed for the development of CLCs in South Papua: a) Participatory Mapping of Educational Needs Engage local communities in identifying learning priorities to ensure that programs are relevant and responsive to real needs (Kaufman, 1994; Rahman & Mulyadi, 2022); b) Capacity Building for Tutors and Managers Strengthen the competencies of CLC personnel through regular training in adult learning methodologies, community facilitation, and digital pedagogy (Miles et al., 2018; Lestari & Widodo, 2022); c) Integration of Local Potential Develop skill-based programs linked to local economic activities such as organic farming, fisheries, and handicrafts to promote self-sufficiency (Anwas, 2023); d) Collaborative Partnership Development Establish partnerships among local governments, universities, and social organizations to provide funding, expertise, and technical support (Hanemann & McCaffery, 2023); e) Public Awareness Campaigns Promote understanding of non-formal education as an equal and valuable learning path to reduce stigma and increase participation (UNESCO, 2022).

These strategies align with the global framework for Lifelong Learning for Sustainable Development (UNESCO, 2022), which encourages countries to integrate community-based education models into their human capital development policies. Implementing such strategies can help South Papua maximize its social capital and strengthen CLCs as catalysts for community empowerment.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights that the implementation of Community Learning Centers (CLCs) in South Papua represents a critical strategy to address persistent educational inequalities and social marginalization. While formal education systems remain inaccessible for many due to geographic and socioeconomic barriers, CLCs offer an inclusive alternative that promotes lifelong learning, literacy improvement, and vocational empowerment.

The findings demonstrate that the demand for non-formal education in South Papua is both urgent and diverse, particularly in areas such as literacy enhancement, vocational skill development, digital literacy, and entrepreneurship. At the same time, there exist substantial opportunities for CLC expansion through supportive national education policies, rich local resources, and multi-sectoral partnerships involving local governments, universities, religious institutions, and civil society.

However, the success of CLC implementation will depend largely on strengthening institutional management, improving educator competence, and increasing community awareness of the importance of non-formal education. Sustainable development of CLCs requires participatory planning, context-based learning programs, and continuous collaboration among stakeholders.

Overall, this study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on community-based education by providing a contextual model for empowering marginalized communities through non-formal learning. It also offers practical recommendations for policymakers and education practitioners to design inclusive, responsive, and sustainable CLC programs in South Papua and other underdeveloped regions.

Future research is recommended to explore quantitative measurements of CLC effectiveness and to examine how digital transformation can enhance the quality and reach of community learning in Indonesia's remote areas.

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