

# Collaborative praxis learning to empower rural area: an action research

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## Article Info

### Article history:

Received Jun 11, 2023

Revised Oct 18, 2024

Accepted Oct 28, 2024

### Keywords:

Collaborative learning praxis

Community services

Economic well-being

Informal learning

Knowledge acquisition

## ABSTRACT

The emergence of collaborative learning praxis among adult learners has gained prominence, fostering lifelong practical learning. This approach empowers adults to define their learning goals based on interests and needs, facilitating contextual information sharing, knowledge acquisition, and skill enhancement. Such an approach promotes innovation and creativity, strengthening market competitiveness. This study focuses on collaborative learning's impact in the village of Sukodono, East Java, Indonesia, post-COVID-19. Collaborative learning facilitated skill development, innovation, and market influence. Action research was employed to restore economic well-being. Themes of healthy environment preservation, community self-help, and market power were explored. The villagers' adoption of biogas technology, digital platforms for product promotion, and focus on high-demand products showcased the efficacy of collaborative learning. This praxis enhances economic conditions and knowledge acquisition, enabling sustainable community development. Further quantitative studies are recommended to assess long-term impacts.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Collaborative learning praxis has emerged as a prominent concept among adult learners and individuals who recognize the significance of practical lifelong learning. This approach has demonstrated its value in empowering adult learners by enabling them to take initiative in defining their own learning goals, materials, and activities based on their interests and needs. Furthermore, it facilitates the sharing of contextual information, the acquisition of insightful knowledge, and the enhancement of specific skills within their desired fields of study. Adult learners engaged in this learning model actively contribute to and benefit from a vibrant learning environment that fosters logical reasoning, contextual knowledge sharing, and practical skill improvement [1].

This collaborative learning model inspires adult learners to demonstrate innovation and creativity in enhancing the quality of their products, thereby gaining a competitive advantage in the market. They actively engage in collective learning and evaluation of their agricultural, food and beverage, furniture, industrial, and service offerings to identify strengths and weaknesses. By practicing and learning together, they identify aspects that may bore or satisfy customers, prompting them to innovate and improve product quality to attract new customers and expand their market share [2], [3]. The collaborative learning model effectively alleviates mental burden, emotional detachment, and learning barriers [4], as adult learners primarily focus on

acquiring valuable information and practical skills to improve their economic well-being. They are no longer preoccupied with rote memorization of academic materials [5], [6]. Instead, they are free to express their opinions, share ideas, and collaborate with one another during the learning process. Their primary concerns revolve around developing practical skills, pursuing individual interests, leveraging effective applied technology, and meeting local demands [7]. Currently, collaborative learning activities are crucial in facilitating the recovery from economic downturn caused by COVID-19. Many individuals have struggled to make ends meet during this challenging period and require assistance in mastering effective applied technology and practical strategies as means to achieve general well-being once the severe crisis subsides.

The current study was conducted in the village of Sukodono in the post-pandemic period of COVID-19. Located in the Dampit district of Malang Regency, Sukodono is an agricultural village situated near Mount Bromo and renowned for its eco-tourism attractions. The majority of residents in this village depend on farming, predominantly horticultural crops, and cattle rearing. The dominant agricultural product in Sukodono Village is *Buah Salak* (Salacca), and residents also raise goats for meat and milk supply to hotels, restaurants, and local markets surrounding Mount Bromo.

The pandemic outbreak in 2019-2021 has led to a decline in agricultural production and reduced market sales [8], [9]. The decrease in income and the decrease in tourist numbers have adversely affected the villagers' ability to sell their products. Consequently, immediate and effective measures were required to address these serious economic challenges. In response, the researchers, alongside students from UIN Malang, engaged in a community service project in Sukodono Village aimed at developing the villagers' skills and equipping them with effective applied technology to recover from the economic recession. The community service from UIN Malang formulated the community service programs based on preliminary data collected through observations and interviews. These efforts aimed to identify the demands of the villagers and determine the necessary actions to alleviate their distressing situation. The researchers and students served as facilitators in the context of collaborative learning activities, allowing the villagers to freely express their ideas, set learning goals, and decide which skills they wished to acquire. The focus was on developing the villagers' skills in innovation, productivity, self-help community initiatives, and market influence.

Collaboration between industry, academic and village administrations to empower village economy is not a new concept in Indonesia. For instance, the formation of BUMDES (*Badan Usaha Milik Desa* or village-owned enterprises), are economic institutions in Indonesia that aim to increase the village economy through collaboration among the village community, academics, and industry. BUMDES is a vital village economic institution in Indonesia, comprising nearly 50,000 units, categorized into 1,000 developed, 10,000 developing, and 30,000 pilot-stage BUMDES. The BUMDES scale-up program, fostering collaboration between BUMDES, academics, and industry, enhances management in institutional, innovation, digitalization, and sustainability aspects, effectively addressing key challenges and serving as a model for village economic growth [10], and the formation of BUMDES since 2020 indicated the willingness of the industry to collaborate with the village administration to produce their needs.

In a slightly different atmosphere, a similar context has been attempted successfully in China amidst the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak; it was reported that the interactions between industry, academic and village administrations and leaders, can impact villagers' trust in the centralized government. In the aforementioned particular case, the village economy was controlled by the centralized management of the government, supervised by the academicians to deliver quality products for the industry to be exported [11]. From a similar setting in China, it was also reported that such a praxis model can support sustainable village development [12]. From the setting of Indonesian tourism village, it was also reported that community-based tourism (CBT) fosters sustainable tourist-community relationships. Previous research underscores the pivotal role of local communities in shaping rural CBT, predominantly from an academic perspective. This study delves into villagers perspectives on sustainable rural CBT in Pampang Village, Indonesia. Using a triangulation method, data was gathered through interviews, field observations, and quantitative assessments of local attraction sustainability. Findings led to a model for establishing sustainable rural CBT in Indonesia [13], emphasizing the innovation power from academicians should be supported by the local wisdom from the villagers and the economic power from the industry to empower and sustain village economy.

In the same light, a study by Shaaban examined the impact of the Village Saving and Loans Association (VSLA), another praxis model between the government, banking industries, and academics on sustainable development in Egypt. The VSLA approach was found to have significantly improved the economic situation of many women and families, overcoming financial hardship and contributing to rural sustainable development. The approach also empowered women financially, enabling them to participate in community development initiatives and play an active role in rural sustainable development [14]. In Shaaban's study, the role of the academics was emphasized in making sure the sustainability of the village economy to fulfill the loan conditions. Nevertheless, different from some of the studies in our literature review, our case in the village of Sukodono was not tourism-based nor bank-loan-based industry. The

location, culture, and community behavior were highly agricultural, where people did not naturally leave the village to hunt, fish, or manufacture goods; they farm [15]. As farming has been their way of living since the village was founded, the villagers are naturally familiar with the traditional farming, which was enough for them to survive in peace until the industrialization era [16] might not be suitable for industrial farming, which is more in-demand currently, to empower and sustain their current economy, moreover, with their gen-Z being more educated outside the village and prefer to continue living in urban area [17]. Related to that, a systematic review on the youth vocational studies suggested that youth with vocational education contributed more to their home villages than individuals from general education [18], despite the youth attitude towards vocational studies are highly determined by their parents' educational and financial situations [19].

The previous studies indicated that the industrial demands of products and service from villages are available and consistently high; however, burdens can be observed in situations where the industry demands more consistent quality of supply that the villages are not able to handle, or that the village is not able to innovate or elevate their value to meet the industry standard of demands [20]. In this situation, the industry would likely to opt for other options than collaborating with villages, such as import, hiring foreign workers, or retraining their existing workforces, which are similarly costlier and less sustainable than collaborating with villagers and village administration. Based on preliminary observation and data collection, the village of Sukodono could have been utilized more of its potential to strive, empower and sustain its own economy. Nevertheless, it is required for to understand how the culture, community, and the tradition of farming and industry in the village should be adjusted, modified, or altered to fulfill the existing industrial needs.

## 2. METHOD

To fulfill the objective, we adopt the method of participation action research, where the researchers directly involved in conducting research and took action to restore situation when the study took place. Then, we classified and analyzed the data based on themes. The study collected and analyzed the data on the following themes: preserving healthy environment, self-help community, and market power.

### 2.1. Review of theories

Collaborative learning improves learner collaboration to acquire information, explore knowledge, and master specified skill [21]. Tutor or teacher in collaborative learning activity facilitated learners to explore new knowledge, manage class debate, and define group project [22]. In light of this, collaborative learning promoted knowledge exploration, professionalism, learner engagement, motivation, and skill improvement through long-life education and adult education program [23], [24]. Adult learners needed sustainable learning activity to update information and skill to keep abreast of dynamic progress of technology and economic development. Adult learning activity provided variant learning programs to spur adult learners collaborate at each other for knowledge exploration and skill improvement. It is crucial for them to survive in tight competition [25]. However, collaborative learning must be well-designed to facilitate learners acquire knowledge, improve skill, and do group project better [26], [27]. John Hopkins University classified student team learning or collaborative learning into ten models. Tutor and teacher are able to implement and combine some models of collaborative learning activity [26], [27]. However, this study focused on three combining collaborative learning models: learning together, student team achievement divisions, and cooperative learning. Learning together facilitated learners to collaborate and learn to one another to understand learning materials [28] and do group project. Cooperative learning suggested learners to be tutor and tutee [29], [30]. Learner who already understand learning materials or master certain skill to be tutor (peer support) for other learners. Students' team achievement divisions classify learners into some groups, and members of each group have to learn certain material or skill then help each other to understand learning material or master specified skill [31].

Further, general well-being is highly connected to gross domestic product, human development index, and sustainable development goals [32] use, social capital, community, government policy, ecology, and religion factor [33]. General well-being was much affected by such circumstances like age, gender, culture, and technology advancement or technology innovation [34]. In light of this, innovation emphasized sustainable thinking process to create something new, originality, and variant of alternatives to make goods and services more efficient and satisfying for customers. Business owner, farmer, doctor, firms, and other professionals were always concerned with the term of innovation. They never achieved a significant productive level in business without innovation. To create new model and effective practical use of certain product affected productivity in business competition. It means that innovation spur business owner, farmer, industry, and other professionals effectively increase productivity to fulfil customers' demand [35].

Innovation must be based on data [36]. It is not connected to individual assumptions, prediction, and preference. Business owner had to identify product quality to meet customer satisfaction by collecting empirical data through survey and random interview to customers. Then, they indexed customer demand,

product supply, product quality, market fluctuation, and others. Data-based innovation resulted in measurable productivity [37]. Innovation must be more effective with collaboration. Collaboration among workers within the company is crucial to restoring, remodeling and redesigning old production to win a tight competitive market. It is also important to collaborate and share resources between companies to improve product quality and build more captive market [38]–[40]. In fact, Honda automobile company collaborated with home industry to supply spare parts like nuts, bolts, wheels and other parts to produce modern, sophisticated, and efficient car.

The business company builds market power through innovation. Innovation lets business company always offer current trends and effective use of new products. It makes customers more satisfied and loyal to buy and use the products [20]. In line with that Aziz *et al.* [41] described that general well-being covered some elements such as production cost efficiency and building more captive market or winning market power. Business company has to spend efficient costs and achieve preferred profit. Market power was also defined by business company power to attract more loyal customers to buy company products. Market power determined sustainability of business company [42].

Recently, it is normal among business competitors to collaborate with each other to build market power. It is efficient to reach more customers for production sales. They share resources to improve product quality. They are hand in hand to promote the product to build loyalty among customers [26]. Collaborative action among the business company in peculiar home-industry businesses showed positive impact to improve business productivity. For example, most villagers of Karang Pandan, Malang run home industry to produce wooden masks. Among villagers collaborate at each other to supply the demand of customer [43].

Apart from that, human empowerment was also crucial to build general well-being. Empowerment was defined as the success to use resources, exploit potential, and optimizing strength to achieve defined goals. Nga *et al.* [44] stated that empowerment may be seen as a process where individuals learn to see a closer correspondence between their goals and a sense of how to achieve them, and a relationship between their efforts and life outcomes [45] defined empowerment as a process, it is the mechanism by which people, organizations, and communities gain mastery over lives [46]. On the other hand, empowerment is defined as the involvement in the community and financial certainty [44]. Even, community collaborative learning affected human empowerment, Boyd and Nowell [47] said that human was empowered through developing knowledge, skill, and professionalism within group collaboration.

## **2.2. Action research**

Action research is chosen as the research method as it fits our plan to introduce the villagers to collaborative learning to achieve common goals [48]. Our team interviewed the villagers to identify any alternatives to recover economic recession in the village. Then, the team defined adult learning project to develop villager skill to build villager economic affluent after the end of pandemic COVID-19. The project was designed using collaborative learning activity. The project was designed as the continuous-sustainable program. The team divided villagers into several learning groups, as collaborative learning would be more effective when the learners have developed their social identity as learning individuals [49]. The team trained and facilitated the first group to learn and help at each other to master specified skill and do the project.

Afterwards, the first group facilitated and guided the next group to do the project as peer support collaborative learning program. In light of this, our team just played the role of a facilitator during learning process. The team just provided suggestion and help to tutor when there was any problem or difficult question during learning process. Collaborative learning program focused on the following group projects.

### **2.2.1. Preserving healthy environment**

The team of UIN Malang conducted collaborative learning to train villagers to preserve a healthy environment for public healthy life. A common and urgent environmental problem to tackle was to process waste. It was domestic waste and waste of cattle. The team guided villagers to classify and process burnable waste and unburnable waste. Villagers were also guided to reduce, reuse, and recycle waste to minimize the impact of dangerous chemical residue on human and the environment. Villagers were facilitated to send unburnable waste like bottles and pottery to recycling centers, and in return, villagers got money from it. Then, the team trained villagers on how to process burnable waste to supply daily needs among villagers. Villagers were able to produce biogas from human and cattle waste. Villagers were also able to use leftovers of grass and leaves as raw materials for organic fertilizer.

Further, the team trained villagers to construct healthy public facilities such as proper drainage systems and sanitation. The team also trained villagers to redesign and reconstruct cattle sheds to let the cattle (goats) produce good quality mutton and milk, which lead to a more productive agricultural business. Preserving a healthy environment in Sukodono village is highly connected to eco-tourism productivity as the village is a transit shelter for tourists before they hike the nearby Mount Bromo, giving the village more dynamics economic value from the agricultural products.

Furthermore, as liquid petroleum gas (LPG) is getting more expensive for the villagers, the team took the initiative to guide villagers to process human waste and cattle waste into biogas by building common containers for 4-5 households in the village to store the waste as the production cost of such biogas is low, the villagers can rely more on biogas to support their daily live, including modified old motorbikes to be biogas-operated vehicle. Similarly, organic fertilizer was created through the same process and save the villagers much budget for agricultural productivity need by replacing the factory-made fertilizer, which is less economically and environmentally friendly.

Furthermore, villagers learned to process grass, hay, leaf, and crushed husk to be nutritious food for goats. Nutritious food is important to improve the quality and quantity of mutton and goat milk. And, villagers got less profit when they depended on industry-made food products to feed goat and other cattle. The team of UIN Malang guided villagers to plant *rumput gajah* (Latin: *Pennisetum purpureum*), *pohon kelor* (Latin: *Moringa oleifera*), and peanuts as the main raw material of cattle food. Villagers planted grass around home. They planted combined rice and peanuts on paddy fields (Javanese: *tumpang sari*). They also used space between salacca trees to plant *pohon kelor* to add value of their soil.

### 2.2.2. Market power

A large number of tourists spent one day or two days in Sukodono village. It is a transit shelter for tourists to take a rest before they go hiking to Mount Bromo. It is beneficial for villagers to sell agricultural products to tourists. Unfortunately, they just sell the product conventionally. Villagers actually miss a big opportunity to earn more money. They sell the product at a low price.

The team of UIN Malang guided villagers to use digital technology to promote their product. Villagers were guided to design a website and use application technology to sell the product. They were able to reach more customers and build a more captive market with digital technology. Business transactions were easier and more convenient by digital technology. Villagers were able to monitor the fluctuation of prices. Villagers were also able to index customer preferences for their products.

Then, the team of UIN Malang guided villagers to identify village potential and market power from the index data. The data showed that a large number of customers were happy to consume variant products of *buah salak* and goat milk. Villagers were suggested by the team to focus on producing *salak* chips and fermented *salak* drinks. It is to meet customer preference and guarantee the availability of products when there is customer demand. For example, one villager lacks of stock, he/she can ask his neighbor to supply. The strategy let villagers collaborate and support to one another to build strong market power together. Further, team of UIN Malang introduced simple applied technology to villagers to process variant product of goat milk. According to index data, villagers focused on producing milk candy and yogurt. In fact, villagers achieved highest market level to sell milk candy and yogurt.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The implementation of the collaborative praxis learning approach has proven to be highly effective in improving the economic conditions and knowledge base of the villagers. Through the structured collaborative learning activities facilitated by the UIN Malang research team, the villagers were able to develop and enhance their skills, leading to increased economic prosperity and self-sufficiency. The projects focused on preserving a healthy environment, promoting self-help within the community, and leveraging market power. By addressing critical environmental issues, such as waste management and proper sanitation, the villagers were able to create a healthier living environment, minimizing the risk of infectious diseases. Moreover, the utilization of biogas technology not only provided a sustainable energy source but also improved agricultural productivity through the production of organic fertilizer. The adoption of digital technology further empowered the villagers to expand their market reach, improve product promotion, and monitor customer preferences. Overall, the collaborative praxis learning model has significantly contributed to the economic upliftment and knowledge acquisition of the villagers, fostering long-term sustainable development within the community.

As a result, the collaboration between the UIN team, the villagers and the industry brought some benefits for each party. Our academic team, including students and lecturers learned more about the gap between the traditional-cultural farming economy and the industrial demand. The villagers get the benefit from the innovation that might reduce their cost, such as by switching from LPG and oil-based fuel to biogas, switching from costly industrial fertilizer to self-produced waste-based fertilizer, or profitable products such as the snack they produce from the fruit. As a result of informal education, this results can be similar to what has been reported in the previous studies, where vocational studies, either towards older or younger generation gave more benefit to the village economy [11]–[13]. Nevertheless, governmental involvement was not pronounced much in our study. As mentioned in the previous study, the Indonesian government has encouraged the formation of village-owned enterprises to represent villagers with lawful industrial bodies to

sell their products and services [10]; in our case, the UIN team played the role of innovators and industrial body until the official BUMDES is formed in the village of Sukodono. In the future formation of BUMDES, can also help the village to find more support from the banking industry such as what has been done in Egypt [14], where villagers can be facilitated with personal loans from the bank; the difference is that in our case, industrial loan can be made through the BUMDES and be used for the benefit of the village. Another case of the governmental involvement in the village economy from the past is the ones in China [11], [12], mainly because in our context, villages such as Sukodono are not directly under the national government such as in China. It is important to note that Indonesia is under a democratic system, where the governance of the village is not centralized. Our observation indicated that centralized government in all the villages in Indonesia might not work well, as every village has its own strengths and weaknesses [40], and each of them might define villagers' empowerment differently from one another; for instance, in the past study about Pampang village [13], the sustainable economy is related to tourism, in many other villages in Indonesia it is related to scaling up the collaboration model into BUMDES, while in the village of Sukodono, temporary supervision and innovation helped them to gain their economic stability and sustainability.

In the context of our study, effective collaboration further amplifies the impact of innovation, both within organizations and through inter-company partnerships as the communication between the university team and the village community was based on the problem-solving approach, where the problem was considered as the entire community problems instead of individuals or only belong to certain generations [23], [24]. Collaboration allows for the redesign and enhancement of existing production processes, leading to success in competitive markets. Companies can build market power by continuously innovating, offering trendy and efficient products, satisfying customers, and achieving cost efficiency. This collaborative learning project was designed as a sustainable, continuous program and was divided into learning groups. The team trained and facilitated the groups, allowing learners to support each other in mastering specific skills and completing projects [35]. One aspect of the project focused on preserving a healthy environment, addressing waste management, and creating biogas from human and cattle waste, which is considered as efforts to add value to the product as well as contributing to the environment; yet it led to the empowerment of the community members overall [47]. Villagers were taught to reduce, reuse, and recycle waste, contributing to environmental preservation. Additionally, improvements in cattle husbandry practices enhanced agricultural productivity, which, in turn, boosted eco-tourism in the village. Market power was another focus, where digital technology was introduced to promote and sell agricultural products more efficiently [26]. Villagers created websites and utilized applications, expanding their customer base and streamlining transactions. Collaborative efforts helped villagers identify market potential and tailor their product offerings to meet customer preferences, building a robust market presence together.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

As a practical implication, the collaborative praxis learning approach in the Village of Sukodono demonstrates the potential for uplifting the economic conditions of rural communities by fostering collaboration between academia, industry, and local residents. This approach not only empowers villagers with valuable skills and knowledge but also enhances their economic well-being by introducing innovative solutions like biogas technology and digital marketing strategies. Furthermore, it highlights the importance of tailoring educational programs to the specific needs and strengths of each community, ultimately contributing to sustainable development. Additionally, the study underscores the significance of collaboration between different stakeholders, including academic institutions, local industries, and government bodies, in addressing economic challenges and promoting general well-being in rural areas. By working together, these parties can bridge the gap between traditional farming practices and modern industrial demands, resulting in improved economic stability and sustainable growth.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study is supported by the collaboration between Lembaga Penelitian dan Pengabdian Masyarakat (LP2M) UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim, Indonesia and the Faculty of Psychology and Social Sciences, University of Cyberjaya, Cyberjaya, Malaysia internal grant no.14/FPSS/2022.

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