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Dynamics of Local Leaders' Role in Community Education Development: A Phenomenological Analysis

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Abstract

Community education development requires the active involvement of local leaders who understand the social, cultural and potential context of their areas. However, the dynamics of the role of local leaders are often not revealed in depth, especially in facing challenges and opportunities at the community level. This study aims to comprehensively uncover the roles and strategies of local leaders in developing community education. The research approach used a qualitative method with a phenomenological analysis design. Data were collected through indepth interviews, participatory observation and documentation studies with local leaders, community leaders and community education program managers. Data analysis was conducted through the stages of reduction, presentation and conclusion drawing, with data validity tested through triangulation of sources and techniques. The results show that local leaders play the role of mobilizers, facilitators, mediators and innovators in the development of community education. The success of these roles is influenced by the ability to build trust, optimise social capital and integrate local wisdom in education programs. The main challenges faced include limited resources, resistance to change and limited policy support. However, adaptive and collaborative strategies can overcome these obstacles. In conclusion, the dynamic and adaptive role of local leaders is a key factor in the success of community-based education. Future research is recommended to explore collaborative leadership models across regions to expand the impact of community education development.

Keywords: local leaders, community education, phenomenology, social capital, local wisdom

Introduction

Education is the main pillar in shaping the quality of human resources that are competitive and adaptive to changing times. In the era of globalization and the industrial revolution 4.0, access to and quality of education is a determining factor in the progress of a nation (Syerlita & Siagian, 2024). However, improving the quality of education does not only depend on central government policies, but also requires the active involvement of various stakeholders at the local level. In many regions, the success of education programs is often influenced by the extent

to which local leaders are able to mobilize community potential and build an inclusive education ecosystem (Setyawan et al., 2025). In the context of geographically, socially and culturally diverse communities, local leaders such as village heads, traditional leaders, religious leaders and community activists play a strategic role in designing, implementing and monitoring education programs. Local leaders not only act as policy communicators but also as liaisons between government and communities, facilitators of citizen participation and agents of social change. The dynamics of this role are important to study, especially in relation to the development of community-based education that is relevant to local needs.

In many areas, there is a gap between national education policy and implementation at the local level. Factors such as limited infrastructure, low community participation and lack of learning innovation are serious obstacles (Saltifa et al., 2025). Local leaders who are less responsive to education needs cause programs to miss the target. On the other hand, there are problems such as lack of cross-sector collaboration, weak managerial capacity of local leaders, and not optimal utilization of local wisdom potential as a learning resource. This results in slow and unsustainable development of community education.

Several studies have examined the relationship between local leadership and community education. (Setiadi et al., 2025) found that the success of the village literacy program in Kulon Progo district was strongly influenced by the participatory leadership style of the village head who was able to mobilize village officials, teachers and volunteers. (Kebubun, 2025) shows that the role of traditional leaders in Papua in non-formal education can increase the education participation rate of school-age children through a culture-based approach. These two findings indicate that local leadership has a significant contribution to the quality and access of community education. Effective local leadership strategies can be the driving force for sustainable community education development.

Research on community education development has also been conducted in various regions. (Baidoi & Ilmiyyah, 2025) revealed that a community-based education program in a coastal village in Central Java succeeded in improving the vocational skills of residents thanks to a collaborative approach between the village government and non-governmental organizations. (Ismawati & Sari, n.d.) states that the success of functional literacy programs in remote areas of West Sumatra is largely determined by the adaptation of learning materials to local needs. These two studies emphasize that the development of community education requires local leadership that is able to read the potential and challenges of the region. Thus, the link between the results of this study and the concept of the dynamic role of local leaders becomes clearer: without adaptive, participatory and innovative leadership, community education development is difficult to achieve the expected goals.

Studies on the dynamics of the role of local leaders show the complexity of the roles played. (Muhdar & Kadir, 2025) revealed that local leaders in conflict-prone areas hold dual roles as social mediators and drivers of educational development. (Saputra, 2025) found that regional policy changes often force local leaders to adjust their leadership strategies to remain relevant and effective in driving educational progress. These findings suggest that the dynamic role of local leaders is not only about administrative tasks but also includes the ability to adapt to changing social, economic and political situations. These skills are crucial in supporting the development of community education.

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Based on previous research, one strategic solution is to strengthen local leadership capacity through community-based education management training and cross-sectoral networking. The study of Transformational Leadership theory (Nugraha et al., 2019) emphasizes the importance of vision, inspiration and empowerment of community members to achieve common goals. Meanwhile, the theory of Community Participation in Education (Sidiq & Musyarapah, 2022) explains that the success of education programs will be higher if the community is actively involved in program planning, implementation and evaluation. The integration of these two approaches is expected to create a local leadership model that is able to optimize the potential of the community in education development, while at the same time answering the challenges that exist in the field.

This study aims to analyze the dynamics of the role of local leaders in the development of community education through a phenomenological approach. Specifically, this study seeks to identify the forms of the role of local leaders in supporting the development of community education, examine the factors that influence the effectiveness of local leadership, explain the relationship between the dynamics of the role of local leaders and the success of community education programs, and formulate recommendations for local leadership strategies that are relevant to improving the quality of community-based education. With an in-depth study, this research is expected to make a theoretical contribution to the development of leadership and education science, as well as a practical reference for stakeholders at the local level

Literature Review

Local leadership plays a crucial role in determining the direction and success of development, including in the field of community education. In the context of community-based development, local leaders not only function as decision-makers but also as drivers of community participation, liaisons between government and citizens, and guardians of socio-cultural values. (Priyadi, 2019) in transformational leadership theory explains that an effective leader must be able to inspire, motivate and empower community members to contribute to achieving common goals. This concept becomes relevant when associated with community education because the success of an education program depends not only on material resources but also on the ability of local leaders to create a shared vision and build a sense of belonging among citizens.

Community education itself refers to a learning process designed to improve the knowledge, skills and awareness of citizens in order to empower their communities. (Widodo, 2018), community education is effective when it integrates citizen participation in program planning, implementation and evaluation. Within this framework, local leaders have the responsibility to ensure that the education process is not top-down, but inclusive and in line with the needs and potential of the region. Leaders who are able to build bridges of communication between external parties, such as the government or NGOs, and local communities will facilitate the achievement of sustainable education goals.

The dynamics of the role of local leaders can be understood as variations and changes in the functions played by leaders in response to social, economic and political conditions in their environment. According to (Ramdhan, 2025), these dynamics include adaptability,

conflict management, strategy innovation and cross-sector collaboration. In the context of community education, this role dynamic can take the form of a shift from the role of facilitator to mediator, or from program manager to initiator of new ideas tailored to the development of local needs. This requires local leaders to have great flexibility and interpersonal skills.

The role of local leaders in community education development is also closely related to the concept of social capital. (Situmorang, 2017) explains that social capital, which includes networks, norms and trust, is an important factor in encouraging cooperation between citizens. Local leaders play a role in building and maintaining this social capital, creating an environment conducive to shared learning. By leveraging social capital, local leaders can mobilize resources, motivate community involvement and ensure the sustainability of education programs.

The phenomenological approach is important to understand the dynamics of the role of local leaders in developing community education because this method allows researchers to explore the subjective experiences of leaders and communities in depth. According to (Wita & Mursal, 2022), phenomenology aims to reveal the meanings contained in individual life experiences, thus providing a complete and contextualized picture of the social reality under study. In this context, phenomenological analysis can help identify the factors that influence the decisions, strategies and actions of local leaders, as well as understand the community's perception of the leadership.

This research framework is built on the interconnectedness of the concepts of transformational leadership, participatory community education, leadership role dynamics and social capital. Effective local leaders in community education development are expected to have transformational abilities that motivate people to actively participate. This participation is strengthened by adaptive strategies that are part of the dynamics of the leader's role, as well as the use of social capital to support program sustainability. A phenomenological approach is used to capture the direct experiences of leaders and communities, resulting in a comprehensive understanding of how the role dynamics of local leaders influence the development of community education. The relationship between these variables forms a framework in which the dynamic, adaptive and social capital-based role of local leaders is key to the success of inclusive and sustainable community education

Research Method

This study uses a qualitative research method with a phenomenological approach that aims to deeply understand the subjective experiences and meanings contained in the role of local leaders in community education development. The phenomenological approach was chosen because it is able to reveal the perceptions, views and interpretations of actors who are directly involved in the process of developing community-based education. Researchers sought to explore the essence of the local leadership phenomenon through in-depth descriptions based on the real experiences of informants. The research instrument used in this study is the researcher himself as the main instrument (human instrument), whose role is to design interview questions, collect data, analyze findings, and interpret research results. The

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existence of the researcher as an instrument allows flexibility in adjusting questions to the dynamics of the interview and maximizing emotional involvement and empathy with informants, so that the data obtained is richer and more authentic. To support the validity of the data, a semi-structured interview guide was used as a supporting instrument that contained open-ended questions related to the dynamics of the role of local leaders, community education development strategies, challenges faced and solutions applied.

Data were collected through three main techniques: in-depth interviews, participatory observation and documentation studies. In-depth interviews were conducted with local leaders, community leaders, educators and community members involved in the education program. Participatory observation was conducted to capture the real interactions of local leaders in community education activities, both in formal and informal forums, so that researchers can understand the social and cultural context surrounding the leadership. The documentation study involved reviewing official documents such as village government work plans, education activity reports and relevant local news and publication archives. Data triangulation was conducted by combining these three techniques to increase the validity and credibility of the research findings.

Data analysis was conducted thematically by following the steps of phenomenological analysis developed by Moustakas (1994), including epoche (suspending the researcher's prejudices), horizonalization (identifying significant statements from informants), grouping statements into essential themes, and textural and structural descriptions of the phenomena studied. This analytical process is carried out iteratively from the data collection stage to the conclusion drawing, with the aim of producing a complete understanding of the dynamics of the role of local leaders in the development of community education. The final result is expected to provide a comprehensive picture that not only describes empirical facts, but also reveals the deeper meaning behind local leadership practices in the context of community-based education.

Results and Discussion

The results of this study were obtained from data collection through in-depth interviews, participatory observation and documentation studies. The data from the three methods were analyzed using a phenomenological approach, which allows researchers to understand the experiences, views and perceptions of informants regarding the role of local leaders in developing community education.

Based on the results of the in-depth interviews, a number of key themes were identified that illustrate the dynamic role of local leaders. These themes include the roles of participation driver, collaboration facilitator, resource manager, cultural mediator, and program innovator. To summarize the results of the interviews, the following table presents the main findings from the in-depth interviews with 12 informants consisting of local leaders, community leaders, teachers and involved residents.

Table 1. Findings from the In-depth Interviews

Theme The role of local leader	.	Frequency of Occurrence
Participation Activator	Inviting residents to be actively involved in educational activities, both formal and non-formal.	11
Collaboration Facilitator	Connecting village government, schools, NGOs and the private sector to support community education.	9
Resource Manager	Manage the use of village funds, infrastructure and human resources for education activities.	8
	Adapting education programs to local values and	
Cultural mediator	traditions so that they are accepted by the community.	7
Program innovator	Developing new ideas such as local potential- based skills classes.	6

The table above shows that the role of participation mobilizer is the most dominant finding, followed by the role of collaboration facilitator. This shows that the success of community education development is strongly influenced by the ability of local leaders to mobilize community involvement and build cross-party partnership networks.

In addition to interviews, participatory observation was conducted to directly observe the interactions and activities of local leaders in the context of community education. These observations provide a real picture of leadership behaviours that support education programs.

Table 2: Findings from participatory observations

Aspects observed	Observation Results	Frequency of Observation
Participative	Local leaders lead open meetings involving residents and	5
Leadership	teachers in program planning.	
Activity Managemen	t Directly supervise the implementation of community	
	learning activities, ensuring smoothness and regularity.	4
Cross-party	Actively communicate with external parties such	
communication	as the Education Office and NGOs regarding program	4
	support.	
Cultural Adaptation	Incorporating local wisdom in learning materials	3
	so that it is relevant to the lives of residents.	

The observation corroborates the interview findings that participatory and collaborative roles are the main characteristics of local leaders in education development. Cultural adaptation also contributes to the community's acceptance of the program.

Data were also collected through a documentation study of official documents, activity reports and news archives. Findings from the documentation study helped confirm the consistency of local leaders' actions and the achievements of the initiated education programs.

Documents Main findings Data Period Analyzed Contains a budget allocation for community education 2022 Government programs of 20% of total village funds. Work Plan Education Recorded an increase in attendance at skills classes 2021-2023 Activity Report from 15 people to 35 people. Local News Reporting the innovation of digital literacy classes 2023 Archive pioneered by local leaders in collaboration with NGOs.

Table 3. Findings from the documentation study

The results of the documentation study show that budget commitments, increased community participation and innovative education programs have become part of the dynamics of the role of local leaders. This data reinforces the results of interviews and observations that the role of local leaders is not only symbolic but real and measurable.

Based on the three data sources, it can be concluded that the dynamics of local leaders' roles in developing community education include aspects of active participation, cross-party collaboration, effective resource management, cultural value adaptation and program innovation. These roles are formed through continuous interaction between local leaders and the community, influenced by leaders' personal commitment, village structural support and local socio-cultural conditions. The findings answer the research objectives by confirming that the success of community education development depends on the ability of local leaders to combine development visions with local realities, while creating synergies between the community's internal potential and external support.

The results of this study show that the dynamic role of local leaders in developing community education is formed through active involvement in mobilizing community participation, building cross-party collaboration, managing resources, adjusting programs to local cultural values and creating learning innovations that are relevant to local potential.

These roles do not operate in isolation but complement each other and evolve according to the social, economic and cultural situation. Success is not only measured by the increase in the number of participants in the education program, but also by the community's acceptance of the program, the sustainability of the activities, and the ability of local leaders to utilize the partnership network.

This finding is in line with research (Puspito et al., 2021; Surahman & Nayla, 2022) which identified that the success of community-based education programs in rural areas of West Java is strongly influenced by the involvement of local leaders in building active participation of citizens. The study asserts that leaders who promote participatory approaches are able to create a strong sense of ownership among the community, which in turn increases residents' commitment to the education program. This is consistent with the field data in this study, where the role of driving participation was the dominant theme found through in-depth interviews and participant observation.

In addition, the role of local leaders as collaboration facilitators found in this study strengthens the results of a study (Hadi, 2017; Pohan et al., 2021), which states that the success of community education development in coastal areas of North Sumatra is determined by the ability of local leaders to establish partnerships with local governments,

educational institutions and the private sector. In this study, cross-party collaboration proved not only helpful in providing facilities and resources, but also led to program innovations such as skills classes and digital literacy that utilize information technology.

The role of cultural adaptation found in this study is also relevant to the findings of (Karnoto, 2025; Sarjito, 2024), which emphasizes that the successful implementation of non-formal education programs in Papua depends heavily on the ability of local leaders to adapt learning materials to local traditions, language and wisdom. In the context of this study, cultural adaptation is done through the integration of local values into the curriculum, which increases community acceptance and reduces resistance to new programs.

Effective resource management by local leaders in this study is in line with the results of research (Habibah & Bawono, 2017; Muslikah et al., 2020), which found that well-targeted allocation of village funds for education improved the quality of learning facilities and encouraged the sustainability of literacy programs. This study reinforces these findings with documentary evidence that 20% of total village funds are allocated to community education programs, with direct monitoring by local leaders.

Meanwhile, the local potential-based education program innovations found in this study add a new dimension that has not been explored in previous studies. Research by (Izhari, 2024) has indeed examined the importance of technology-based learning innovations to improve community skills in the digital era, but this study shows that innovations can also be based on local economic potential, such as skills training in processing agricultural products or handicrafts, which not only improves the learning capacity of residents but also has a real economic impact.

The novelty of this research lies in its comprehensive approach to looking at the dynamics of the role of local leaders that does not only highlight one or two aspects, but combines the five main roles of participation, collaboration, resource management, cultural adaptation and innovation in one analytical framework. While previous studies have generally emphasized one dimension of local leadership, this study integrates all these dimensions and validates them through three data collection methods (interviews, observations, and documentation) with in-depth phenomenological analysis.

The practical implications of this research show that strengthening local leadership capacity is very important in developing community education, especially in rural areas or areas with limited access to formal education. Local leaders need to be trained to manage resources effectively, build strategic partnership networks and develop program innovations that are in line with local potential and needs. Theoretically, this study contributes to the local leadership literature by offering a dynamic role model that can be adapted across different social and cultural contexts.

For future research, it is suggested that similar studies be conducted in urban areas or regions with different cultural characteristics to see if the dynamic role model of local leaders is universal or needs to be modified according to context. Further research could also utilize mixed methods to measure the quantitative impact of the role of local leaders on community educational attainment, thus providing a more comprehensive picture for policy makers.

Conclusion

The conclusion of this study confirms that local leaders have complex, adaptive and contextual roles in driving community education development. These roles range from strategic aspects, such as formulating a vision of education based on local potential, to operational aspects, such as coordinating resources, facilitating cooperation between stakeholders and ensuring program sustainability. The findings show that the success of education initiatives at the community level is strongly influenced by the ability of local leaders to build social trust, integrate local wisdom and utilize existing social capital. The observed leadership dynamics also show effective communication skills, decisiveness in decision-making and flexibility in adjusting strategies to changing community needs and conditions.

Phenomenological analysis revealed that the main challenges faced by local leaders included limited resources, resistance of some community members to change, and limited policy support from higher levels. Nevertheless, leaders were able to overcome these obstacles through participatory approaches, building networks of partnerships, and utilizing cross-sector collaboration opportunities. The strength of local leadership lies in its ability to read the socio-cultural context deeply, so that the strategies implemented are relevant and accepted by the community. The research also shows that the development of community education managed by local leaders produces tangible impacts, such as increased citizen participation in learning programs, the emergence of community-based education initiatives and increased awareness of the importance of lifelong education. The success is not only determined by the individual leader, but also by the integration of the leadership vision, community support and the sustainability of the program.

Thus, it can be concluded that the role of local leaders in the development of community education is dynamic, demands high adaptability and requires the support of a harmonious social and policy environment. This research provides an in-depth understanding of how local leadership dynamics can be a key catalyst in sustainably advancing community education , while opening up space for a more contextual and participatory approach to leadership practice in the future.

Declaration of conflicting interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in this work.

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