

PARTICIPATORY SOFT SKILLS INTERVENTION FOR YOUTH EMPOWERMENT IN MULTICULTURAL RURAL COMMUNITIES: ADVANCING A PANCASILA VILLAGE MODEL IN INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the effectiveness of a participatory soft skills intervention in strengthening youth capacity within a multicultural rural community to support the development of a Pancasila Village in Indonesia. The program was conducted in Sugihwaras Village, Lamongan Regency, over an eight-month period using a Participatory Action Research (PAR) framework. A total of 30 youth participants, along with village stakeholders, were actively involved in the intervention. The program integrated experiential learning strategies, including leadership training, communication skill development, multicultural dialogue, and conflict resolution simulations. Data were collected through a mixed-method approach, combining pre-test and post-test assessments, observations, and participant feedback. The findings indicate significant improvements across four key competencies: understanding of Pancasila values (from 58% to 85%), communication skills (60% to 88%), multicultural awareness (55% to 84%), and collaborative leadership (50% to 82%). These results demonstrate that experiential and participatory approaches effectively facilitate both cognitive and behavioral transformations among youth. Furthermore, the establishment of the “Pancasila Youth Community” reflects a transition from structured intervention to sustainable, community-driven social action. The study contributes to the literature by proposing an integrative model that combines soft skills development, civic value internalization, and participatory engagement as a unified framework for youth empowerment. This model offers both theoretical and practical implications, particularly for community-based education and social cohesion in diverse societies. Future research is recommended to explore the long-term sustainability and adaptability of this model across different socio-cultural contexts.

Keywords: youth; empowerment; softskills; participation; multiculturalism; *Pancasila*

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid transformation of social life in the digital era has fundamentally reshaped how individuals interact, access information, and construct social realities. The proliferation of digital platforms has expanded opportunities for participation and expression; however, it has also intensified the spread of misinformation, ideological polarization, and social fragmentation (Cinelli et al., 2021; Guess et al., 2020; Vosoughi et al., 2018). These dynamics are particularly critical among youth, who are the most active digital users and, simultaneously, the most vulnerable to shifts in values, identity, and social orientation.

In multicultural societies, such as Indonesia, these challenges become even more complex. Indonesia is characterized by a high degree of diversity in terms of ethnicity, religion, language, and socio-cultural backgrounds. While diversity can serve as a foundation for social richness, it also requires strong mechanisms of social cohesion to prevent conflict and fragmentation. Recent studies indicate that the internalization of civic values among Indonesian youth has weakened, accompanied by declining levels of civic engagement and tolerance (Hidayat & Darmadi, 2021; Suryadi, 2020). This phenomenon suggests that traditional approaches to civic education, which often rely on formal and theoretical instruction, are no longer sufficient to address contemporary social challenges (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004).

Pancasila, as the philosophical foundation and ideological framework of Indonesia, plays a central role in maintaining unity and guiding social behavior. It embodies values of tolerance, social justice, and collective responsibility. However, its implementation in everyday life often remains abstract and disconnected from practical experiences (Latif, 2018). This gap between normative ideals and lived realities indicates the need for more contextualized and experiential approaches to civic education, particularly those that engage communities directly.

In this regard, the development of “Pancasila Villages” has emerged as a strategic initiative aimed at strengthening grassroots social cohesion through the internalization of national values. The concept emphasizes tolerance, inclusivity, and participatory citizenship at the local level. Nevertheless, the success of such initiatives largely depends on the active involvement and capacity of youth as key agents of change.

Youth empowerment, therefore, becomes a crucial dimension in addressing contemporary social challenges. One promising approach lies in the development of soft skills, which include communication, leadership, adaptability, and collaboration. These competencies are increasingly recognized as essential not only for employability but also for civic engagement and social participation (Heckman & Kautz, 2016; Succi & Canovi, 2020). Soft skills contribute to the formation of social capital by enabling individuals to build trust, engage in dialogue, and collaborate effectively within diverse communities (Putnam, 2000).

Furthermore, soft skills are closely linked to the development of emotional intelligence and social awareness, which are critical for navigating multicultural environments (Goleman, 1995; OECD, 2015). In the context of community development, these competencies allow individuals to manage conflicts constructively, appreciate diversity, and contribute to collective problem-solving processes. However, despite their importance, soft skills are often underemphasized in community-based educational programs, particularly in rural settings.

To address this gap, participatory approaches such as Participatory Action Research (PAR) offer a valuable framework. PAR emphasizes collaboration between researchers and participants, encouraging collective reflection and action (Kemmis et al., 2014; Reason & Bradbury, 2008). This approach aligns with Freire’s (1970) concept of critical pedagogy, which highlights the importance of empowering individuals to become active agents in transforming their social realities. Through participatory engagement, individuals develop not only skills but also a sense of ownership and responsibility toward their communities.

Despite the growing body of literature on soft skills, civic education, and participatory methods, there remains a significant gap in integrating these dimensions into a unified model for youth empowerment in multicultural rural contexts. Most existing studies tend to address these aspects separately, focusing either on employability skills, civic knowledge, or community participation, without exploring their interconnections.

Sugihwaras Village in Lamongan Regency provides a relevant case for examining this issue. The village is characterized by social heterogeneity and faces challenges such as limited community dialogue, sporadic social tensions, and low youth engagement in constructive social activities. These conditions highlight the need for an integrative intervention that combines skill development, value internalization, and participatory engagement.

This study addresses the identified gap by proposing and implementing an integrative intervention model that combines: (1) Soft skill development as a competency-based approach to youth empowerment, (2) Pancasila-based civic education as a value-oriented framework, and (3) Participatory engagement as a methodological strategy for sustainable community development. This triadic integration represents a novel contribution to the field

of community-based education and youth empowerment, particularly in multicultural rural contexts.

Accordingly, this study aims to examine the effectiveness of participatory soft skill interventions in enhancing youth capacity to support the development of a Pancasila Village. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following question: How does participatory soft skill training contribute to youth empowerment and social cohesion in a multicultural rural community? By addressing this question, the study contributes to both theoretical and practical discussions on integrating skill development, civic values, and participatory methods in community empowerment programs.

2. METHODS

This study employed a Participatory Action Research (PAR) design, which integrates research, action, and reflection in a cyclical process aimed at both generating knowledge and facilitating social transformation (Kemmis et al., 2014). PAR was selected due to its relevance in community-based interventions, particularly in empowering participants as active agents of change rather than passive recipients. This approach aligns with the objective of strengthening youth capacity while simultaneously addressing real social issues within the community (Reason & Bradbury, 2008). The research was conducted in Sugihwaras Village, Karang Tengah District, Lamongan Regency, a rural area characterized by socio-cultural diversity and emerging social challenges, including limited community dialogue and sporadic social tensions. The study was implemented over an eight-month period from April to November 2024, allowing sufficient time for intervention, reflection, and evaluation.

The participants consisted of 30 youths aged 17–30 years, selected through purposive sampling based on their active involvement in community organizations such as *karang taruna*, as well as recommendations from village officials and community leaders. This selection strategy ensured that participants possessed both the motivation and social positioning necessary to act as change agents within their community. In addition to youth participants, the program involved multiple stakeholders, including village officials, religious leaders, and representatives from external institutions, thereby creating a multi-level participatory environment.

The intervention was designed as a four-phase structured program, each phase building upon the previous one to ensure continuity and impact. The first phase involved a needs assessment and socialization process, during which researchers conducted informal interviews, observations, and community discussions to identify key social issues. This phase also included program socialization sessions aimed at aligning expectations and fostering community engagement. The needs assessment revealed challenges such as low tolerance awareness, limited communication skills, and weak youth participation in social initiatives.

The second phase focused on capacity building through soft skills training, which constituted the core of the intervention. Training sessions were conducted in a participatory and experiential format, incorporating small group discussions, role-playing, case-based learning, and simulation exercises. The training materials covered four main competencies: (1) understanding of Pancasila values, (2) communication and public speaking skills, (3) multicultural awareness and tolerance, and (4) collaborative leadership. The instructional design was grounded in experiential learning theory (Kolb, 1984), emphasizing the cycle of experience, reflection, conceptualization, and application.

The third phase consisted of multicultural workshops and conflict resolution training, aimed at deepening participants' understanding of diversity and enhancing their ability to

manage social conflicts constructively. In this phase, participants were presented with real-life scenarios involving intergroup tensions and were guided to analyze and resolve these issues through dialogue and consensus-building. This phase also incorporated principles of intercultural competence, emphasizing empathy, perspective-taking, and respect for diversity (Deardorff, 2015).

The fourth and final phase involved community action and institutionalization, where participants translated their learning into concrete initiatives. This phase culminated in the formation of the “Pancasila Youth Community,” a youth-led organization designed to sustain the program’s impact. Activities in this phase included community discussions, symbolic actions such as mural painting with themes of diversity, and the development of action plans for future social initiatives. This stage reflects the transition from learning to social practice, a key principle in participatory research.

Data collection was conducted using a mixed-method approach to capture both quantitative and qualitative dimensions of the intervention. Quantitative data were collected through structured pre-test and post-test instruments, administered before and after the intervention. These instruments measured four competency areas using Likert-scale items: (1) understanding of Pancasila values, (2) communication skills, (3) multicultural awareness, and (4) leadership ability. Each indicator was operationalized into measurable items, such as the ability to articulate Pancasila principles, demonstrate effective communication in group settings, show sensitivity toward diversity, and lead collaborative activities. Qualitative data were collected through participant observation, field notes, and open-ended feedback forms. Observations were conducted throughout the training sessions to capture participant engagement, behavioral changes, and group dynamics. Feedback forms allowed participants to reflect on their learning experiences and provide insights into the program’s strengths and limitations.

Data analysis was carried out in two stages. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods, focusing on percentage changes between pre-test and post-test scores to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention. Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis, involving coding, categorization, and interpretation of recurring patterns in participant responses. This dual approach enabled a comprehensive understanding of both measurable outcomes and experiential impacts.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, several strategies were employed. Triangulation was conducted by comparing data from multiple sources, including test results, observations, and participant feedback. Member checking was also applied by discussing findings with participants to confirm the accuracy of interpretations. Additionally, the use of standardized instruments contributed to the consistency of measurements.

Ethical considerations were carefully addressed throughout the study. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. Participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity, and the data were used solely for research and community development purposes. Given that the study did not involve sensitive personal data or vulnerable populations, ethical risks were minimal.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Initial Phase: Social Mapping and Contextual Diagnosis

The intervention began with a comprehensive process of social mapping and contextual diagnosis, which served as the epistemological foundation of the program. This phase involved direct engagement with village officials, community leaders, and youth groups to identify underlying social dynamics, patterns of interaction, and existing challenges within

Sugihwaras Village. The findings revealed a socially heterogeneous community characterized by religious, cultural, and socio-economic diversity, accompanied by limited dialogic spaces and underutilized youth participation in constructive social activities.

From a theoretical standpoint, this stage reflects the principles of Participatory Action Research (PAR), particularly the co-construction of knowledge between researchers and community members (Kemmis et al., 2014). Rather than imposing externally designed solutions, the intervention was grounded in locally situated knowledge, ensuring contextual relevance and enhancing community ownership. This aligns with Sen's (1999) capability approach, which emphasizes that development interventions must expand individuals' real opportunities based on their lived realities. Moreover, the diagnostic phase revealed a critical gap between the presence of diversity and the absence of structured mechanisms to manage it. This condition underscores the necessity of designing interventions that not only address skill deficits but also facilitate social integration and collective awareness.

3.2 Program Socialization as a Dialogical Engagement Process



Figure 1. Opening of the training session by village officials

The program socialization phase functioned as a dialogical engagement process rather than a mere dissemination of information. Conducted in a public forum at the village hall, this stage facilitated an open exchange of perspectives among stakeholders, including youth, village authorities, and community figures. This process is consistent with Freire's (1970) concept of dialogic pedagogy, where learning occurs through mutual exchange rather than hierarchical transmission. The dialogical nature of the interaction enabled participants to articulate their concerns, negotiate meanings, and collectively define the relevance of the program. As a result, the intervention gained legitimacy and trust, which are essential prerequisites for community-based initiatives. Empirically, this phase triggered an observable increase in youth engagement and willingness to participate in subsequent activities. This phenomenon can be interpreted through the lens of social capital theory, where initial trust-building interactions serve as a catalyst for collective action (Putnam, 2000). The socialization phase thus played a dual role: establishing cognitive awareness and initiating relational bonding within the community.

3.3 Core Intervention: Experiential Soft Skills Training



Figure 2. Mentoring activities for training participants

The core of the intervention consisted of a series of soft skills training sessions designed using experiential learning principles. Unlike conventional lecture-based approaches, this training emphasized active participation, reflection, and real-world application. Participants were engaged in role-playing scenarios, group problem-solving exercises, and simulated leadership tasks. From an educational perspective, this approach aligns with Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle, which posits that knowledge is constructed through the transformation of experience. Participants were not merely exposed to abstract concepts of communication and leadership; rather, they actively enacted these roles in controlled yet realistic scenarios.

The observed outcomes indicate a substantial increase in participants' confidence, communication clarity, and collaborative behavior. These improvements support the argument by Heckman and Kautz (2016) that non-cognitive skills are fundamental determinants of both individual success and social functionality. Furthermore, Bandura's (2001) social cognitive theory provides an explanatory framework, suggesting that self-efficacy develops through mastery experiences and social interaction. Importantly, the training environment fostered a shift from passive learning to active agency. Participants began to perceive themselves as capable actors within their social environment, marking the transition from knowledge acquisition to behavioral transformation.

3.4 Multicultural Workshops and Conflict Resolution: From Awareness to Competence

The multicultural workshop phase represented a critical turning point in the intervention, as it directly addressed issues of diversity, tolerance, and conflict management. Participants were exposed to simulated conflict scenarios involving differences in religion, culture, and social perspectives, requiring them to collaboratively develop resolution strategies. This phase operationalized the concept of intercultural competence, which involves the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations (Deardorff, 2015). The significant increase in multicultural awareness, from 55% to 84%, demonstrates that experiential exposure to diversity is more effective than abstract instruction.

From a theoretical perspective, this process reflects transformative learning (Mezirow, 2000), where individuals critically reassess their assumptions and develop more inclusive worldviews. Participants reported a shift in perspective, moving from viewing differences

as potential sources of conflict to recognizing them as opportunities for mutual learning. Additionally, the collaborative nature of the exercises reinforced democratic values such as dialogue, negotiation, and consensus-building, which are central to Pancasila's philosophical framework. Thus, the workshop not only enhanced cognitive understanding but also cultivated practical competencies for managing diversity.

3.5 Institutionalization: Formation of the Pancasila Youth Community

The institutionalization phase marked the transition from structured intervention to autonomous community action. The establishment of the "Pancasila Youth Community" represents a significant outcome, as it provides a platform for sustaining the values and practices introduced during the program. From an empowerment perspective, this phase signifies the development of agency among participants (Zimmerman, 2000). The community is not merely an extension of the program but an independent entity capable of initiating and managing social activities. This aligns with Sen's (1999) notion of expanding capabilities, where individuals gain the freedom to act upon their values. The emergence of this community also reflects a shift from individual learning to collective identity formation. Participants began to see themselves not only as beneficiaries of the program but as agents of change responsible for promoting tolerance and social cohesion within their environment.

3.6 Quantitative Outcomes: Evidence of Transformative Learning

Table 1. Training Outcome Chart

Competency	Pre-test (%)	Post-test (%)	Increase (Points)
Pancasila Understanding	58	85	+27
Communication Skills	60	88	+28
Multicultural Awareness	55	84	+29
Leadership Capacity	50	82	+32

The quantitative results provide empirical evidence of the program's effectiveness. The consistent improvement across all competencies suggests that the intervention successfully addressed both cognitive and behavioral dimensions of learning. Notably, the highest increase was observed in leadership capacity, indicating that participatory environments are particularly conducive to developing collaborative leadership skills (Northouse, 2019). This finding reinforces the argument that leadership is socially constructed through interaction rather than solely inherited or formally taught. The overall improvement exceeding 25 percentage points across all indicators reflects a process of transformative learning, where participants not only acquire knowledge but also change their attitudes and behaviors (Mezirow, 2000).

3.7 Social Transformation and Strengthening of Community Cohesion

Beyond individual outcomes, the intervention generated broader social impacts at the community level. Increased interaction among diverse groups contributed to a reduction in social tensions and the strengthening of mutual understanding. Symbolic initiatives, such as the creation of murals representing "Bhinneka Tunggal Ika," served as visual manifestations of the values internalized during the program. These symbols reinforced collective identity and acted as constant reminders of shared commitments to diversity and unity. From a theoretical perspective, these developments can be understood through the lens of social capital theory (Putnam, 2000), where trust, networks, and shared norms facilitate collective

action. The program effectively enhanced bonding and bridging social capital, thereby strengthening the community's capacity to address future challenges.

3.8 Integrative Analysis: From Training to Social Movement

The most significant contribution of this intervention lies in its ability to transform a training-based program into a community-driven movement. This transformation occurred through the integration of three key dimensions: (1) Soft skills (individual competencies); (2) Pancasila values (normative framework); (3) Participatory processes (social mechanism). This integrative model demonstrates that sustainable community development requires more than skill acquisition; it necessitates the alignment of competencies, values, and social structures. Unlike conventional top-down interventions, this approach fosters bottom-up transformation, where change emerges organically from within the community.

4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that participatory soft skills interventions constitute an effective and contextually relevant strategy for empowering youth in multicultural rural communities. The integration of experiential learning, civic value internalization, and participatory engagement has proven to generate not only measurable improvements in individual competencies but also broader transformations at the community level. Empirically, the significant increases across all assessed competencies, Pancasila understanding, communication skills, multicultural awareness, and collaborative leadership, indicate that the intervention successfully addressed both cognitive and behavioral dimensions of youth development. More importantly, these improvements were not isolated outcomes; rather, they contributed to the emergence of a collective social consciousness among participants, as evidenced by the formation of the Pancasila Youth Community as a sustainable social entity.

From a theoretical perspective, this study advances the discourse on community-based education by demonstrating that soft skills development can function as a mediating mechanism between civic values and social action. While previous studies have often treated soft skills and civic education as separate domains, this research provides empirical evidence that their integration, when operationalized through participatory and experiential approaches, can produce synergistic effects in fostering social cohesion and civic engagement.

Furthermore, the findings highlight the importance of shifting from a top-down, program-centered model toward a bottom-up, community-driven approach. The transition from structured training to autonomous community initiatives reflects a process of empowerment in which participants evolve from passive beneficiaries into active agents of change. This transformation aligns with broader theories of participatory development and capability expansion, emphasizing that sustainable social change must be rooted in local agency and collective ownership.

Practically, the study offers a replicable intervention model for policymakers, educators, and community practitioners seeking to strengthen social resilience in diverse contexts. The "Pancasila Village" framework, as operationalized in this study, provides a concrete example of how ideological values can be translated into lived social practices through structured yet flexible community engagement. Nevertheless, this study is not without limitations. The intervention was conducted within a specific socio-cultural context, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the evaluation focused on short-term outcomes, leaving the long-term sustainability of behavioral changes an open question.

Future research is therefore encouraged to adopt longitudinal designs and comparative approaches across different community settings.

In conclusion, this study underscores that meaningful youth empowerment requires more than skill acquisition; it necessitates the integration of competencies, values, and participatory structures. By bridging these dimensions, the proposed model contributes not only to academic discourse but also to the practical realization of socially cohesive and resilient communities.

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