

Structural Access and Relational Reinforcement in Community-Based Alternative Education: A Naturalistic Study of a PKBM–Church Partnership in Indonesia

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Abstract: Community learning centers can extend educational access, but less is known about how partnerships with faith-based organizations shape institutional access and everyday learning interactions. This naturalistic qualitative study examined collaboration between PKBM Bina Kreasi and an Adventist church institution in Tuah Karya, Pekanbaru, Indonesia. Data comprised interviews with three key program informants, observations conducted on 10 and 13 August 2025, and review of curriculum, administrative, instructional, and faith-based documents. Evidence was organized within four domains—positive behavior, verbal response, nonverbal response, and motivational support—and compared across interviews, observations, and documents. The analysis indicates two complementary layers of educational strengthening. First, PKBM Bina Kreasi provided structural access through curriculum, academic administration, learning materials, reporting processes, and a pathway to recognized credentials, while the church contributed a local venue, volunteer tutors, moral mentoring, and social support. Second, tutors generated relational reinforcement through respectful dialogue, specific encouragement, eye contact, smiles, responsive explanations, appropriate challenges, simple rewards, and personal attention. These practices coincided in the observed setting with participation, task responsibility, orderly behavior, courteous communication, and sustained motivation. The evidence also revealed variability: some learners were shy, fatigued, distracted, bored, or constrained by family work obligations and stigma toward non-formal education. The study therefore does not establish causal effects on academic achievement. It contributes an empirically grounded distinction between structural access and relational reinforcement and shows how their interaction may support an inclusive learning climate. Comparative, longitudinal, and learner-centered research is needed to test the transferability and outcomes of this model.

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INTRODUCTION

Education is both a public right and a foundational condition for individual capability, social participation, and community development. Indonesia's National Education System Law recognizes formal, non-formal, and informal pathways as parts of a single national system and assigns non-formal education a complementary and substitute role when formal provision does not meet learners' needs (Republic of Indonesia, 2003). Yet participation still declines sharply at upper-secondary age. Statistics Indonesia reported that the national school participation rate for people aged 16–18 years was 73.42% in 2023, substantially below the rates for the younger compulsory-school-age groups (BPS–Statistics Indonesia, 2023). Provincial and municipal education-statistics reports likewise identify access, continuity, and

educational inequality as continuing concerns in Riau and Pekanbaru (BPS–Statistics of Riau Province, 2024; BPS–Statistics of Pekanbaru Municipality, 2024). These patterns do not imply that every non-participating young person has left education permanently, but they underscore the need for flexible pathways that can reach learners whose schooling is interrupted by economic, social, geographic, or personal constraints.

Non-formal education is particularly relevant because it can operate as a complement, alternative, or supplement to formal schooling while adapting its organization to local circumstances (Brennan, 1997). Its boundaries are not defined simply by a location outside school; rather, non-formal provision generally combines intentional learning with greater flexibility in participation, scheduling, pedagogy, and institutional structure (Eshach, 2007). Romi and Schmida (2009) further argue that non-formal education should be understood as a distinctive educational force rather than a residual category of extracurricular activity. In Indonesia, Pusat Kegiatan Belajar Masyarakat (PKBM), or community learning centers, embody this function by linking lifelong learning, community participation, equivalency education, and local empowerment. A recent bibliometric analysis found sustained growth in PKBM scholarship and identified lifelong learning, community participation, and non-formal education as central themes, while also noting uneven collaboration and emerging research gaps in the Global South (Puspita & Sujarwo, 2025). The policy relevance of PKBM therefore extends beyond providing a second chance: these institutions can connect recognized educational pathways with locally responsive support.

Flexibility alone, however, does not guarantee continuity or quality. Community learning centers often operate with constrained facilities, volunteer labor, uneven public recognition, and learners whose participation is affected by poverty, work responsibilities, low confidence, or stigma. Such conditions make collaboration a practical rather than merely aspirational strategy. Cross-sector collaboration involves organizations sharing information, resources, activities, and capabilities to pursue outcomes that no single organization could readily achieve alone (Bryson et al., 2006). It is also organizationally demanding because partners bring different mandates, cultures, accountabilities, and resources (Selsky & Parker, 2005). In education, school–community partnership models range from limited service coordination to integrated arrangements in which community actors contribute directly to learning, family support, and institutional development (Valli et al., 2018). Family and community participation can also strengthen the continuity of support surrounding learners, although the quality and reciprocity of the relationship matter more than the existence of a partnership label (Epstein, 2010).

Evidence from Indonesian alternative education supports the potential of such complementarity. Herlina et al. (2019) found that collaboration between an alternative school and community partners helped mobilize educational resources for marginalized learners. The relevance of that finding to PKBM is not that every partnership has identical outcomes, but that alternative provision can become more viable when an educational institution's formal functions are connected to community-based resources. The present study concerns a particularly instructive configuration: PKBM Bina Kreasi supplied curriculum, academic administration, learning materials, report-card processes, and a route to recognized credentials, while a local Adventist church institution supplied a learning venue, volunteer tutors, moral and spiritual mentoring, and close social support. The arrangement was designed for learners who faced difficulty accessing conventional schooling, including those from economically constrained families.

Faith-based organizations have long participated in social service and education, particularly where public or market provision leaves gaps. Their potential assets include community embeddedness, volunteer commitment, trust networks, and a moral vocabulary that can sustain collective action (Berger, 2003). More recent scholarship cautions against treating faith-based participation as either inherently beneficial or inherently exclusionary. DeLaquil et al. (2026) show that faith-based organizations can contribute to development education while operating within complex relationships between religious identity and ostensibly secular public goals. In Indonesia, Utami and Kusakabe (2026) describe “edu-community” practices through which religious communities organize education, mobilize local actors, and address gaps in provision. At the same time, educational partnerships involving religious institutions require explicit safeguards for inclusion, freedom of belief, child protection, and non-coercion. The analytical question is therefore not whether a church is present, but what resources it contributes, how those resources interact with recognized educational structures, and how learners experience the resulting environment.

Institutional access is only one part of the educational problem. Learners who enter an alternative program must also encounter interactions that sustain participation. Feedback research demonstrates that information about performance can influence learning, but its effects vary according to content, timing, level, and the learner’s interpretation (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). A large meta-analysis similarly found an overall positive effect of feedback while warning that feedback is not a uniform treatment and that generic praise is not equivalent to task-relevant guidance (Wisniewski et al., 2020). This distinction is important in non-formal settings, where tutors may rely heavily on encouragement. Encouragement can support confidence, but its educational value is stronger when it is credible, specific, connected to effort or strategy, and followed by a meaningful next step.

The relational dimensions of teaching extend beyond words. Positive affective teacher–student relationships are associated more strongly with engagement than with achievement, and the strength of those associations varies across contexts and designs (Roorda et al., 2011). Research on teacher immediacy likewise links verbal and nonverbal behaviors—such as respectful address, proximity, eye contact, facial expression, and responsive interaction—to students’ motivation and perceptions of learning (Liu, 2021; Witt et al., 2004). These studies do not justify reading every smile or nod as evidence of learning. They do, however, provide a useful framework for examining how communication can reduce social distance and create a climate in which learners are more willing to participate. Self-determination theory offers a complementary explanation: motivation is more likely to be sustained when learning environments support competence, relatedness, and autonomy rather than relying only on external control (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

The source study approached these classroom processes through four domains: positive behavior, verbal response, nonverbal response, and motivational support. These domains captured observable and reported features of the learning climate, but they were not psychometrically validated scales and should not be interpreted as quantitative indicators. More importantly, examining them separately can obscure the institutional conditions that make relational support possible. A tutor’s encouragement occurs within a broader arrangement that determines whether learners have a recognized curriculum, a nearby venue, learning materials, administrative continuity, and an attainable credential. Conversely, structural provision may remain underused when the learning environment is impersonal, discouraging, or unresponsive.

This article therefore rearticulates the case around a two-layer analytical distinction: structural access and relational reinforcement. Structural access refers to the institutional and material conditions through which participation becomes possible and educational progression becomes legible. Relational reinforcement refers to the verbal, nonverbal, and motivational interactions through which participation is recognized, guided, and sustained. The study asks: How does collaboration between PKBM Bina Kreasi and an Adventist church institution support educational access and the day-to-day learning climate in Tuah Karya? The article contributes by showing how complementary institutional roles and micro-level pedagogical interactions operated together in one Indonesian community-based program. It does not claim that the partnership caused academic improvement; instead, it identifies mechanisms, tensions, and boundary conditions that can guide more rigorous evaluation and responsible replication.

METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design and Setting

A naturalistic qualitative design was used to examine a bounded collaboration between PKBM Bina Kreasi and an Adventist church institution in Tuah Karya, Tuah Madani District, Pekanbaru City, Riau Province, Indonesia. A naturalistic orientation was appropriate because the study sought to understand practices and interactions in the setting in which they ordinarily occurred, rather than manipulating instructional conditions. The unit of analysis was the collaborative educational arrangement and the learning environment it supported.

Tuah Karya is an urban community in western Pekanbaru characterized in the source report as socially diverse and affected by uneven educational attainment. The learning activities observed for this study took place at the local church site. Within the partnership, PKBM Bina Kreasi carried the recognized educational and administrative functions, whereas the church provided a proximate venue and community-based instructional support. The study focused on how this division of roles was enacted and how tutors described and responded to learners' participation.

B. Participants and Evidence Base

The analyzed interview sample consisted of three key informants directly involved in program delivery. BA served as the church coordinator and liaison between the church and PKBM Bina Kreasi. YY was a volunteer tutor, and LT was a volunteer tutor and graduate of Universitas Riau. The codes are retained from the source report to avoid using personal names. The study also observed learners attending instructional activities, but the source report did not provide a complete learner roster, demographic profile, or a documented learner interview sample. Accordingly, this article does not present students as interview participants and does not attribute claims to student testimony.

The sample was purposive in the practical sense that all three informants occupied roles relevant to the collaboration and could describe daily implementation. Their perspectives provide detailed practitioner accounts but do not represent the full range of stakeholders. In particular, direct perspectives from learners, parents, PKBM managers, government officials, and community members were not documented in the final results and are treated as an important limitation rather than inferred.

Table 1. Participants and evidence base

Source	Role or material	Contribution to analysis	Boundary
BA	Church coordinator and PKBM church liaison	Institutional roles, learner participation, tutor strategies	Provider perspective
YY	Volunteer tutor	Daily learning interactions, task responsibility, motivation	Provider perspective
LT	Volunteer tutor; Universitas Riau graduate	Participation, communication, personal support	Provider perspective
Observations	Learning activities dated 10 and 13 August 2025	Behavior, verbal and nonverbal interaction, attention, classroom order	Short observation window; learner demographics not reported
Documents	Curriculum, P5 materials, administrative / reporting records, teaching materials, photographs, selected biblical passages	Program design, institutional functions, character framework	Normative documents do not prove universal implementation

C. Data Collection

Data were generated through in-depth interviews, direct observation, and document review. Fieldwork records in the thesis identify two principal dates: Sunday, 10 August 2025, and Wednesday, 13 August 2025. Interviews explored learner behavior, communication, motivation, instructional challenges, and tutor responses. The source report indicates that interviews were recorded and supported by written notes, but it does not report interview duration or provide complete verbatim transcripts. Consequently, the present article treats most interview material as summarized informant accounts. Only short expressions explicitly documented as examples of tutor language are reproduced.

Observations focused on classroom participation, task completion, peer cooperation, verbal interaction, facial expression, body posture, tutor feedback, classroom order, and changes in attention over the course of a session. The observations included both convergent and discrepant behaviors. For example, many learners appeared attentive and prepared, whereas some became fatigued, hesitant, distracted, or hyperactive. Retaining these observations was important because the case was not uniformly positive.

Documents reviewed in the source study included the Kurikulum Merdeka used in the program, materials associated with the Proyek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila, teaching materials, academic and administrative records, report-card evidence, activity guidelines, photographs, and selected biblical passages used in character-oriented instruction. Documents were treated as evidence of program design and normative expectations, not as proof that every stated practice occurred in every session.

D. Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

The source study used data reduction, data display, conclusion drawing, and verification. For this article, that procedure was organized as a domain-based thematic synthesis. The four original domains—positive behavior, verbal response, nonverbal response, and motivational support—served as sensitizing categories. Within each domain,

the material was condensed into subthemes, compared across the three informants and three data-collection methods, and checked against observations that complicated the dominant pattern. This approach is compatible with thematic analysis as a flexible method for identifying patterned meaning while maintaining transparency about the analyst's organizing framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis did not calculate frequencies or treat the domains as scales.

A second interpretive pass examined relationships among the domains. This pass produced the distinction between structural access and relational reinforcement. Structural access was assigned only when the evidence concerned institutional recognition, curriculum, administration, credentials, learning space, material access, or affordability. Relational reinforcement was assigned when the evidence concerned verbal feedback, nonverbal immediacy, personal attention, responsive explanation, challenge, reward, or social encouragement. The two-layer model is therefore an analytic interpretation derived from the original evidence, not an additional fieldwork finding or a tested causal model.

Trustworthiness was supported primarily through method triangulation. Interview summaries were compared with observed behavior and documentary evidence, consistent with triangulation as the use of multiple sources or methods to develop a more comprehensive account (Carter et al., 2014). Matrices in the source report displayed convergence across BA, YY, and LT, while negative or variable cases—such as low confidence, boredom, fatigue, and divided attention—were retained in the results. The use of explicit analytic categories and attention to disconfirming details are consistent with recommendations for transparent thematic work and credible qualitative reporting (Nowell et al., 2017; Tracy, 2010). No independent second coder, formal intercoder agreement procedure, or documented participant validation of the final themes was reported; the findings should therefore be read as a carefully triangulated but interpretive account.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Results

1. Complementary Institutional Roles and Structural Access

The collaboration operated through differentiated rather than duplicated responsibilities. PKBM Bina Kreasi supplied the institutional architecture: the curriculum, learning materials, academic administration, report-card processes, and a pathway toward recognized certification. The church supplied the proximate social infrastructure: a learning venue, volunteer tutors, day-to-day facilitation, moral and spiritual mentoring, and personal support. Informants described the two organizations as sharing a concern for children and young people who had limited access to formal schooling. Their roles were mutually dependent. The church could host learning and sustain relationships, but PKBM participation gave the program educational direction and administrative recognition. PKBM could provide an accredited pathway, but the church made that pathway locally reachable and relationally supported.

This complementarity reduced several access barriers at once. A neighborhood venue lowered the practical distance between learners and instruction. Volunteer facilitation and the reported free-learning arrangement reduced direct cost pressure for families with limited financial resources. Curriculum and administrative records connected informal-looking local sessions to a recognized educational trajectory. These features mattered because some learners reportedly had to help parents work, and some experienced negative perceptions of non-formal education. The partnership did not

remove poverty or stigma, but it created a route through which learners could continue studying despite those constraints.

The source documents also linked the partnership to the Kurikulum Merdeka and to character-oriented activities. This connection gave tutors a framework for academic content, projects, discipline, cooperation, and respectful interaction. Faith-based materials were used alongside the curriculum to frame courtesy, honesty, responsibility, and care for others. In analytic terms, the arrangement combined credential-bearing structure with a community-held learning environment. Structural access was therefore more than physical entry; it included recognition, continuity, affordability, and the expectation that current participation could lead to future educational progression.

Table 2. Complementary institutional contributions

Partner	Primary contributions	Educational function	Observed or reported value
PKBM Bina Kreasi	Curriculum; learning materials; academic administration; reporting; credential pathway	Recognition, continuity, and progression	Local sessions were connected to an identifiable educational route
Adventist church institution	Learning venue; volunteer tutors; daily facilitation; moral–spiritual mentoring; social support	Proximity, relational support, and community embeddedness	Learners received accessible instruction and personal attention
Joint arrangement	Role complementarity; free local learning; curricular and character-oriented activities	Structural access combined with relational reinforcement	Participation became both practicable and connected to future progression

2. Positive Behavior and Character Formation

Across the three informants, learners were generally described as active, curious, and willing to follow tutor guidance. Observations on 10 August showed that many participants asked questions, prepared learning materials, and engaged in group activities. Punctuality and readiness were repeatedly used by informants as signs of active participation. Responsibility extended beyond completing assigned work: learners were also reported to share tasks, help peers, respect differing opinions, and contribute to classroom cleanliness. These behaviors were interpreted by tutors as evidence that the program was strengthening both learning habits and character.

Documentary evidence reinforced this interpretation but also clarified its normative basis. The Kurikulum Merdeka and the Proyek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila emphasized discipline, responsibility, cooperation, and mutual respect. Biblical passages and church-based routines were used within the program to reinforce courtesy, honesty, humility, and care. Thus, “positive behavior” did not refer only to compliance. It encompassed participation, responsibility, prosocial conduct, and moral formation as understood within the partnership’s curricular and faith-based context.

The pattern was not uniform. Some learners initially remained quiet and contributed more readily in small groups than in whole-class discussion. A few were described as hyperactive and sought frequent attention, which could interrupt the

session. Interest also varied by topic and age level; informants reported that older learners sometimes showed lower enthusiasm, and observational notes recorded moments of inattention when material felt difficult or sessions ran long. Tutors responded by distributing attention, using group work, offering reminders without escalating tension, and changing the activity format. When learners avoided or failed to complete a task, tutors combined admonition with explanation of responsibility rather than relying solely on punishment.

These variations are analytically important. They indicate that positive behavior was not a fixed learner trait produced automatically by the program. It was negotiated through the fit between task, learner confidence, group format, tutor responsiveness, and the broader moral expectations of the setting. The strongest evidence concerns the presence of conditions and interactions that supported participation and responsibility. The study did not independently measure whether these behaviors persisted outside observed sessions or improved over time.

3. Verbal and Nonverbal Relational Reinforcement

Verbal interaction was characterized by a generally courteous, patient, and two-way communication style. Tutors reported using praise, encouragement, constructive advice, and questions designed to stimulate thinking. Documented examples included “Bagus sekali!” (“Very good!”) and “Terus semangat ya!” (“Keep up your enthusiasm!”). Importantly, praise was observed not only after correct answers but also after a learner attempted an incomplete answer. Tutors then provided guidance or invited further thinking. This sequence suggests that verbal reinforcement functioned as an invitation to continue participating rather than as a simple declaration that an answer was correct.

Learners’ verbal participation varied. Several asked questions frequently and joined discussions, whereas others listened quietly, hesitated in front of peers, or waited until after class to approach a tutor. Passivity was associated in the records with difficult or less interesting material and with low confidence rather than overt opposition. Tutors attempted to reduce the social cost of speaking by maintaining a relaxed tone, using humor, asking accessible questions, and explicitly inviting learners to explain their ideas. During the observed session on 10 August, neither tutors nor learners were recorded using harsh insults or humiliating criticism. This observation is limited to the documented fieldwork and should not be generalized beyond it.

Nonverbal communication reinforced the same relational pattern. On 13 August, learners’ attention was visible in eye contact, forward-leaning posture, note-taking, timely preparation of writing materials, and quick responses to instructions. Smiles and small changes in facial expression accompanied moments of understanding or interest. Tutors used eye contact, smiles, nods, proximity, and, in one reported practice, a light tap on the shoulder to acknowledge effort. Informants believed that these behaviors made learners feel noticed without interrupting the flow of instruction.

Again, the evidence included counterexamples. Near the end of a session, some learners lowered their heads, leaned on desks, or briefly lost focus. Other body-language patterns included slouching, looking away, slow movement, or limited participation in discussion. Tutors reportedly treated such signals as information about the need to adjust pacing, provide personal attention, change the activity, or move learning outdoors. The educational significance of nonverbal behavior in this case

therefore lay less in decoding a universal meaning from each gesture and more in tutors' responsiveness to changes in observable engagement.

Taken together, the verbal and nonverbal findings show a relational reinforcement cycle. Tutors recognized an attempt through words or gestures; learners received a signal that participation was safe and valued; tutors then adjusted explanation or challenge in response to learners' cues. The cycle was most visible when feedback combined warmth with instructional direction. The study does not establish that these interactions improved test scores, but it documents how they supported an inclusive, low-threat learning climate during the observed activities.

4. Motivational Support Amid Structural and Personal Barriers

Motivational support came from both external and internal sources. Externally, tutors offered encouragement, task guidance, appropriately scaled challenges, simple rewards, and personal attention. Rewards mentioned in the records included stickers and certificates. Tutors also asked learners about difficulties, simplified explanations, organized small-group participation, and provided additional help to those who lacked confidence. Informants described family support, peer interaction, the church community, and PKBM's recognized pathway as additional sources of encouragement. The free local program was especially salient for learners whose families faced financial pressure.

Internally, learners were described as wanting good grades, further education, improved future opportunities, and the capacity to help their families. These aspirations did not eliminate barriers. Some learners experienced boredom, shame about speaking, uncertainty about their ability, or reduced interest in particular subjects. Others had limited study time because they assisted parents with work. Informants also identified stigma toward non-formal education as a demotivating social influence. One tutor noted that expectations of automatic grade progression could weaken task commitment for some families and learners. These accounts point to motivation as an unstable relationship between aspiration, perceived competence, social recognition, and practical opportunity.

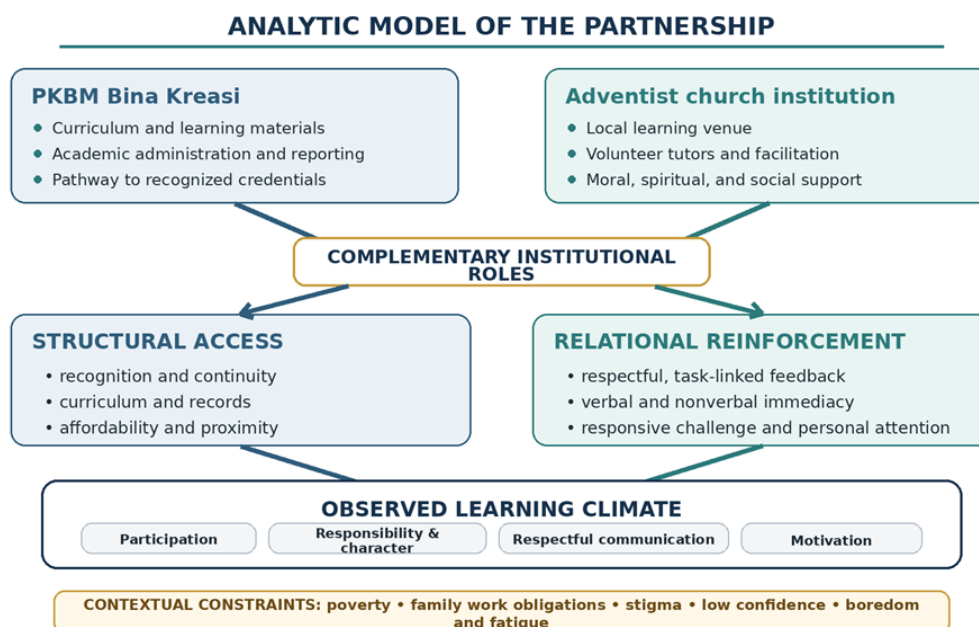
Tutors used instructional variation to respond to motivational decline. Reported adaptations included educational games, quizzes, group discussion, brief movement opportunities, outdoor learning, and changes in pacing. The aim was not simply entertainment; variation was used to restore attention and create manageable entry points into the task. Personal approaches were particularly important for learners who appeared capable but reluctant. By asking about difficulties privately and offering a feasible next step, tutors attempted to convert generalized encouragement into support for competence.

The evidence across interviews, observations, and documents converged on the importance of both institutional and relational supports. A recognized credential pathway made continued participation meaningful, while a nearby venue and volunteer tutors made it practicable. Within sessions, encouragement, responsive explanation, and social belonging helped learners remain involved. Motivation was therefore not located solely "inside" the learner. It was produced and constrained through the interaction of aspirations, feedback, family obligations, community perceptions, and program design.

Table 3 summarizes the cross-source themes and the discrepant evidence retained in the analysis. The findings support the conceptual model shown in Figure 1: institutional complementarity creates structural access; tutor–learner interaction creates

relational reinforcement; both operate within constraints that can interrupt participation. The model is an interpretation of a single case and should be used as a proposition for future testing rather than as proof of effectiveness.

Figure 1. Structural access and relational reinforcement in the PKBM–church partnership



Note. Model synthesized from interview, observation, and document evidence. Arrows present a proposition for future testing and do not represent estimated causal effects.

Table 3. Cross-source synthesis of findings, divergent evidence, and interpretation

Analytic domain	Convergent evidence	Divergent or boundary evidence and interpretation
Structural access	PKBM supplied curriculum, administration, reporting, and credential pathways; the church supplied venue, volunteer tutors, mentoring, and social support.	The partnership reduced practical barriers but did not remove poverty, stigma, or work obligations. Access is interpreted as recognition, continuity, affordability, and proximity.
Positive behavior and character	Learners were often active, punctual, prepared, responsible for tasks, cooperative, respectful, and willing to help peers.	Some were shy, hyperactive, unfocused, or less interested. Positive behavior was situational and supported through group work, reminders, attention, and varied activities.
Verbal and nonverbal reinforcement	Respectful two-way dialogue, questions, specific encouragement, smiles, nods, eye contact, attentive posture, and responsive explanation supported participation.	Some learners stayed quiet, looked away, slouched, or fatigued. Cues were used to adjust teaching; they were not treated as direct measures of learning.

Analytic domain	Convergent evidence	Divergent or boundary evidence and interpretation
Motivational support	Appropriate challenges, simple rewards, personal attention, family support, future aspirations, and the recognized pathway sustained engagement.	Low confidence, boredom, stigma, financial pressure, and family work obligations interrupted motivation. Support was relational and structural rather than solely internal.

B. Discussion

The central contribution of this study is the distinction between structural access and relational reinforcement. The two are analytically separable but practically interdependent. PKBM Bina Kreasi contributed a recognized curriculum, administrative continuity, learning materials, reporting processes, and credential pathways. The church contributed a nearby venue, volunteer labor, community relationships, and moral–social accompaniment. These combined resources made participation more feasible and future-oriented. Within that structure, tutors used verbal feedback, nonverbal immediacy, appropriately challenging tasks, and personal attention to sustain a learning climate in which learners were more willing to participate. The case thus suggests that “strengthening education” is not adequately described by access alone or by classroom encouragement alone. It emerges from the interaction between an institutional pathway that is worth entering and a relational environment that makes continued participation psychologically and socially manageable.

This interpretation is consistent with the classic view of non-formal education as complementary, alternative, or supplementary to formal systems (Brennan, 1997), but it adds specificity. In the present case, non-formal provision was not institutionally loose in every respect. PKBM’s curricular and administrative functions supplied recognizable structure, while the community site supplied flexibility and proximity. This combination complicates a simple formal/non-formal binary. Eshach (2007) emphasizes that forms of learning differ along multiple dimensions, and Romi and Schmida (2009) argue that non-formal education has distinctive pedagogical and organizational capacities. The PKBM–church arrangement illustrates a hybrid configuration: formal recognition and documentation were connected to a community-based setting whose strength lay in adaptation and relationships.

The structural layer also clarifies why collaboration mattered. Cross-sector collaboration is valuable when partners contribute distinct capabilities toward an outcome that would be difficult for either to achieve independently (Bryson et al., 2006). That condition was visible here. The church’s venue and tutors did not by themselves provide a recognized educational trajectory, while PKBM’s institutional functions did not by themselves guarantee a local, trusted, low-cost learning environment. The partnership resembled the resource-complementarity logic described in cross-sector scholarship (Selsky & Parker, 2005), although the source data do not document formal governance arrangements, decision rules, conflict-resolution procedures, or resource-sharing agreements. For sustainability, the partnership should therefore move beyond interpersonal goodwill and articulate roles, safeguarding responsibilities, communication routines, and mechanisms for joint evaluation.

The case also aligns with school–community partnership research that emphasizes integrated support around learners (Valli et al., 2018) and with Indonesian evidence that

community collaboration can help alternative education mobilize resources for marginalized groups (Herlina et al., 2019). However, the present evidence is narrower than an outcome evaluation. It documents reported and observed supports, not verified changes in enrollment persistence, equivalency-examination completion, credential attainment, or academic achievement. The phrase “effective partnership” should therefore be used cautiously. A stronger evaluation would track participation over time, compare expected and actual progression, and include learners who discontinued the program as well as those who remained.

The relational layer provides a second explanatory mechanism. Tutors’ praise was often paired with guidance, questions, or an invitation to try again. This matters because feedback is most educationally useful when it communicates information about the task, process, or next step rather than merely expressing approval (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). The meta-analytic evidence reviewed by Wisniewski et al. (2020) also warns that feedback effects are heterogeneous and that praise should not be assumed to improve learning. In this case, the strongest practice was not the word “good” by itself; it was the sequence of recognizing effort, maintaining dignity, and supporting a feasible continuation of the task. Future tutor development should therefore emphasize specific, credible, and actionable feedback—for example, naming what a learner did successfully and identifying the next strategy to attempt.

Nonverbal findings offer a related but bounded insight. Eye contact, smiles, nods, attentive posture, and responsive proximity were associated in the observed setting with a warm and participatory climate. Systematic review evidence links teacher verbal and nonverbal immediacy with student motivation, while also noting that much of the underlying research is correlational (Liu, 2021). Earlier meta-analysis found stronger relationships with affective and perceived learning than with objectively measured cognitive performance (Witt et al., 2004). The current case fits that pattern: the data are strongest for engagement, comfort, and perceived support, not achievement. The tutors’ attention to fatigue, slouching, and withdrawal also shows why nonverbal behavior should be used as a prompt for inquiry rather than a definitive diagnosis. A learner who looks away may be bored, tired, confused, anxious, or preoccupied; responsive teaching requires checking rather than assuming.

The findings on motivation are especially compatible with self-determination theory. Appropriate challenges and constructive feedback can support competence; personal attention and respectful interaction can support relatedness; opportunities to ask questions, work in groups, and engage through varied activities may provide limited forms of autonomy support (Ryan & Deci, 2020). The evidence for competence and relatedness is clearer than the evidence for autonomy, because learners’ participation in decision-making was not systematically examined. Simple rewards were also used. Such rewards may help initiate participation, but they should not crowd out intrinsic or personally endorsed reasons for learning. The learners’ reported aspirations—continuing education, achieving good results, improving their future, and helping their families—provide a stronger basis for sustained motivation when tutors connect daily tasks to those goals.

Positive teacher–student relationships are associated with engagement and, more modestly, achievement across a large body of research (Roorda et al., 2011). The present case adds contextual detail by showing how relationship-building occurred in a volunteer-supported non-formal program: greeting learners warmly, listening closely, avoiding humiliating criticism, varying instruction, recognizing small efforts, and approaching

hesitant learners personally. Yet relational warmth should not be romanticized. Volunteer tutors require preparation in inclusive pedagogy, boundaries, child safeguarding, and referral when learning or psychosocial needs exceed their competence. Physical gestures such as touching a learner's shoulder should be governed by culturally appropriate safeguarding rules and consent, not treated as a universally acceptable technique.

The faith-based setting contributed a moral framework, volunteer commitment, and community infrastructure. This is consistent with literature showing that religious organizations can mobilize trust, identity, and service capacity (Berger, 2003). Contemporary work also demonstrates that faith-based actors can occupy productive but complex positions in education and development (DeLaquil et al., 2026). In Indonesia, community-organized religious education can address gaps in provision and create locally owned educational systems (Utami & Kusakabe, 2026). The present case differs because the partnership also pursued general and credentialed education, not only religious instruction. Its potential strength lies in linking community care with a recognized pathway. Its ethical boundary is equally clear: access to educational opportunity should not be conditional on religious adherence, and moral or spiritual activities should respect learners' and families' beliefs, voluntary participation, and rights. These safeguards were not documented in the source thesis and must be addressed in future program governance and reporting.

Several practice implications follow. First, the partners should formalize institutional complementarity through a written agreement that specifies curriculum responsibilities, learner records, credential processes, tutor recruitment, safeguarding, inclusion, data protection, and financial accountability. Second, relational reinforcement should be treated as a professional practice rather than an intuitive personality trait. Tutor preparation can focus on task-specific feedback, questioning, non-humiliating correction, recognition of disengagement cues, differentiated support, and responsible use of rewards. Third, evaluation should capture both layers of the model. Structural indicators might include enrollment, attendance, continuity, examination participation, credential attainment, affordability, and referral pathways. Relational indicators might include learner-reported belonging, psychological safety, feedback quality, participation, motivation, and experiences of respect. The original four domains can inform observation, but they require clearer operational definitions and validation before being used as measurement scales.

Fourth, learner and family voice should become central. The current findings are filtered mainly through tutor perspectives and researcher observation. Learners may interpret praise, religious activities, discipline, rewards, and partnership benefits differently from adults. Parents may identify scheduling, transport, work, or stigma barriers not visible during sessions. PKBM managers may clarify administrative constraints and the actual pathway to certification. Participatory evaluation could therefore test whether the two-layer model reflects stakeholder experience or primarily the viewpoint of program providers.

The study's limitations are substantial and delimit its contribution. It concerns one partnership at one site and relies on three church-side key informants. Observations were documented on two dates, providing only a short temporal window. The final results do not include direct interviews with learners, parents, or PKBM managers. The source report did not specify interview duration, complete transcript procedures, a second coder, or member checking of the final interpretation. The four domains were defined in advance,

which supported focus but may have constrained emergent analysis. No baseline, comparison group, attendance series, assessment scores, or longitudinal credential outcomes were available. Finally, the faith-based and local cultural context may limit transferability.

These limitations do not erase the value of the case; they define the level at which its claims are credible. The study offers a mechanism-oriented account and a testable proposition: community-based alternative education may be strengthened when recognized institutional access is paired with sustained relational reinforcement. Future research should compare multiple PKBM partnerships, include learner and family narratives, follow cohorts over time, document governance and safeguarding, and combine qualitative evidence with attendance, progression, and learning measures. Such designs could determine whether the observed learning climate predicts durable educational participation and whether similar partnerships can operate inclusively across different religious and community contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study shows how a PKBM church partnership supported community-based alternative education through two interconnected layers. PKBM Bina Kreasi supplied structural access by linking local learning activities to curriculum, academic administration, reporting processes, and recognized educational progression. The Adventist church institution supplied a proximate venue, volunteer tutors, moral–social accompaniment, and a supportive community setting. Within this structure, tutors used respectful dialogue, encouragement, responsive explanation, eye contact, smiles, appropriate challenges, simple rewards, and personal attention. Across interviews, observations, and documents, these practices coincided with active participation, task responsibility, cooperative behavior, courteous communication, and motivation to continue learning. The evidence also revealed hesitation, distraction, fatigue, boredom, low confidence, stigma, and competing family work obligations, demonstrating that participation remained contingent rather than uniformly strong. The study therefore contributes a mechanism-oriented interpretation rather than proof of academic effectiveness: structural access makes participation possible and meaningful, while relational reinforcement helps make participation sustainable in everyday practice. This distinction can guide the design and evaluation of other community-based education partnerships, provided that roles, safeguarding, inclusion, and freedom of belief are explicitly governed. Because the case involved one site, three tutor informants, two principal observation dates, and no longitudinal achievement data or direct learner interviews, future studies should include multiple stakeholders, comparison sites, student voice, and measures of attendance, progression, credential attainment, and learning over time.

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