Strengthening Digital-Based Youth Organizational Leadership to Revitalize Community Participation in Mejoyo Village, Mojokerto

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ABSTRACT

Youth organizations hold potential as transformative agents within community governance, especially in rural settings where traditional modes of participation are being reshaped by digital technologies. This study aimed to enhance digital-based leadership among youth organizations in Mejoyo Village, Mojokerto Regency, addressing organizational stagnation and diminished civic engagement. Using participatory action methodology, researchers implemented leadership workshops, digital communication training, and collaborative engagements with village authorities. Quantitative and qualitative data were gathered via focus group discussions, structured observations, and reflective questionnaires. Findings revealed increases in leadership competencies, organizational initiative, and youth-led community projects. The study highlights that digital leadership capacity building fosters sustainable youth participation, strengthens intergenerational collaboration, and contributes to vibrant community governance. These insights have implications for designing youth empowerment programs that integrate digital competencies with community development frameworks.

Keywords:

Youth Leadership; Community Empowerment; Digital Skills; Organizational Development; Participatory Engagement.

Introduction

Youth organizations represent a critical institutional mechanism through which young people can actualize their potential, contribute meaningfully to community development, and cultivate leadership competencies that extend beyond individual self-interest. Historically, youth groups have been central to social mobilization and transformative movements, both globally and within Indonesia (P. Lestari et al., 2024). The advent of digital technologies and shifting socio-cultural dynamics have further redefined youth roles in civic spaces, positioning them as both beneficiaries and drivers of digital-era community engagement.

In rural contexts, especially at the village level, youth participation often manifests through formal and informal organizations such as *Karang Taruna* a statutory social organization focused on youth welfare and social engagement under Indonesian law (Permensos No. 77/2010). As a distinctive social structure, *Karang Taruna* aims to empower young people to act as agents of change, strengthen community networks, and support welfare initiatives (Winanto et al., 2024). However, organizational performance in many areas remains inconsistent, with varying levels of participation, leadership efficacy, and program sustainability. This inconsistency underscores the need to investigate not only the existence of youth organizations but also *how* they function, adapt, and sustain impact especially amid the digital transformation permeating rural society.

A growing body of research highlights the multifaceted role of youth organizations in rural development. Studies in Indonesian villages suggest that *Karang Taruna* can significantly enhance youth involvement in community activities (Basthian & Nusantara, 2022), including social welfare programs, local economic initiatives, and cultural engagement (Aulia et al., 2023). For example, research in Desa Punden Rejo found that youth participation in organizational management positively

correlates with program execution and community expectations, though time constraints and competing commitments remain barriers (Aulia et al., 2023). Similarly, exploratory studies in several communities show that *Karang Taruna* contributes to community empowerment and social cohesion when supported with structured planning and effective communication. These findings collectively affirm the strategic function of youth organizations but also reveal persistent gaps in leadership capacity and sustainable engagement.

One notable shortcoming in the existing literature is the limited integration of digital competencies and leadership readiness within youth organizational research. While the benefits of youth organizational participation are well documented, there is relatively scant empirical attention on how digital skills shape leadership outcomes and organizational renewal particularly in rural areas where digital access may be constrained. Recent work on local empowerment underscores that youth engagement strategies that leverage digital literacy have the potential to foster innovation and amplify civic participation (Sinaga, 2025). However, this recognition has often remained theoretical without systematic operationalization in community-based programs focusing on leadership and organizational transformation.

Furthermore, studies on youth involvement typically focus on descriptive aspects of participation (e.g., frequency of involvement, program types, demographic correlations), with less emphasis on transformative processes of leadership learning that respond to complex rural challenges. The intersection of digital literacy, leadership development, and participatory community governance remains underexplored in the Indonesian rural context. This gap is particularly salient given the increasing relevance of digital platforms for communication, collaboration, and information dissemination in contemporary community development paradigms (Suwandi & Rakuasa, 2024).

Beyond technical skills, research also highlights broader psychosocial and institutional barriers that impede youth engagement. For instance, motivational challenges, limited organizational renewal processes, and insufficient coordination with local governance structures constrain the actualization of youth potential. These barriers are often symptomatic of deeper systemic issues, such as inadequate mentorship frameworks and weak institutional support, which further limit the long-term sustainability of youth-led initiatives. Against this backdrop, the present study seeks to contribute to both theory and practice by focusing on strengthening digital-based leadership competencies within youth organizations to enhance community participation and organizational resilience. The research situates itself at the nexus of three core themes: youth organizational empowerment, digital leadership readiness, and participatory rural governance. It aims to address the question: *How can structured leadership strengthening interventions, incorporating digital competencies and participatory engagement, revitalize youth organizational function and participation in rural community development?*

To achieve this, we adopt a participatory action approach that involves direct engagement with youth members, organizational stakeholders, and village governance actors. This model not only enables practical capacity building but also generates contextual insights into the mechanisms through which leadership dynamics evolve in rural organizational settings. Structurally, this article proceeds as follows: Section 2 outlines the methodological framework and research design, clarifying data collection and analysis strategies. Section 3 discusses the results, highlighting changes in leadership perceptions, organizational practices, and participatory behaviors, and situates these findings within existing literature. Section 4 reflects on theoretical contributions and practical implications for community development practice. Finally, the concluding section synthesizes core insights while proposing pathways for future research and policy engagement.

Methods

This research adopted a Participatory Action Research (PAR) design, which emphasizes collaborative engagement between researchers and community participants in jointly identifying, exploring, and addressing social issues. PAR is widely applied in community empowerment projects because it supports continuous cycles of reflection and action, enabling participants to become co-researchers rather than passive subjects. In the context of community development and organizational strengthening, PAR facilitates shared problem-solving and promotes practical outcomes aligned with the participants' lived realities. Previous studies using PAR in community-based settings demonstrate

its ability to improve organizational structures and empower participants to take active roles in sustainable social change. For example, a study applying PAR to strengthen organizational governance in a youth group illustrated how collaborative processes can improve organizational function and social values in rural communities (Prasetya & Ihsan, 2022).

The research was conducted in Mejoyo Village, Bangsal District, Mojokerto Regency, East Java, from January to March 2023. This rural context was selected based on preliminary observations indicating weakened youth involvement in formal community organizations (*Karang Taruna*) and emerging potential for digital engagement among the youth. A purposive sampling strategy was used to recruit participants who actively represented diverse youth groups and community stakeholders, including members of *Karang Taruna*, religious youth groups, village officials, and local community leaders. Purposive sampling ensured that the research involved participants with direct experiential knowledge regarding leadership challenges and organizational dynamics.

Data collection began with an initial diagnostic phase aimed at capturing the existing conditions of youth organizations, leadership understanding, and organizational practices. Field observations during youth meetings and organizational gatherings were complemented by semi-structured interviews with key informants and focus group discussions (FGDs) with youth participants. Triangulation of these qualitative methods strengthened the credibility of the findings, as internal consistency was assessed across multiple sources of data. This approach aligns with applications of PAR in community-focused research, where various participatory techniques such as observation, interview, and collective reflection are integrated to uncover both subjective and shared meanings within community processes (Alfiana et al., 2023).

Following the diagnostic phase, the research team facilitated an intervention stage where leadership strengthening and digital organizational skills were co-developed with the participants. Rather than delivering top and down instruction, the workshops and collaborative sessions emphasized shared reflection, collective planning, and co-design of action plans that addressed organizational priorities. Digital tools were introduced as practical instruments to enhance communication, coordination, and agenda setting among youth members, in recognition of the role digital competencies play in modern civic engagement and participatory governance. This intervention design reflects practices reported in digital empowerment studies where PAR is used to embed technological skills as part of socio-organizational change processes (Hafizoh et al., 2026).

The final phase focused on reflection and evaluation, which involved post-intervention discussions, participant reflections, and feedback sessions with village authorities. The evaluation aimed to capture shifts in leadership understanding, organizational practices, and participatory behaviors. This iterative feedback ensured that the research moved beyond description to practical transformation, consistent with the fundamental logic of PAR. Ethical considerations such as informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation were observed throughout the research process to uphold respect and transparency in researcher–participant relationships. Collectively, this methodological approach allowed a holistic and context-sensitive exploration of how youth leadership and organizational vitality can be strengthened through collaborative action, participatory engagement, and integration of digital competencies.

Results and Discussions

The implementation of the community service program produced substantive changes in youth leadership awareness, organizational participation, and collective engagement within youth organizations in Mejoyo Village. Prior to the intervention, youth organizational activities were largely routine based, with limited strategic orientation and low participation consistency. Observational data and preliminary discussions revealed that organizational meetings were often attended by the same individuals, while decision-making processes tended to be centralized among a small leadership circle. This condition resulted in weak leadership regeneration and reduced organizational vitality (N. Lestari et al., 2023).

Following the participatory leadership strengthening activities (Figure 1), a gradual yet meaningful shift was observed in how youth members perceived and enacted leadership roles. Participants began to demonstrate greater confidence in articulating ideas, expressing critical

perspectives, and assuming responsibility during organizational discussions. Leadership was no longer understood merely as a formal position, but increasingly recognized as a collective practice embedded in shared responsibility and collaboration. This transformation reflects the internalization of participatory leadership values, which emphasize inclusivity, shared decision-making, and mutual accountability within community organizations.

Figure 1. Leadership Discussion Session

Another significant outcome of the program was the improvement in organizational communication patterns. Before the intervention, coordination relied primarily on face-to-face interactions, which were often constrained by participants' academic and occupational commitments. This limitation contributed to irregular meetings and delayed organizational responses. After the intervention, youth members began to adopt more structured communication practices, including the use of digital messaging platforms and collaborative planning forums. These tools enabled more flexible coordination, facilitated information sharing, and encouraged participation from members who had previously been less active. As a result, organizational activities (Figure 2) became more inclusive and adaptive to members' daily realities.

Figure 2. Digital Coordination Activity

The strengthening of leadership capacity also had implications beyond internal organizational dynamics. Youth organizations demonstrated increased engagement with village governance structures, particularly in community-based activities and local development initiatives. Post-intervention observations indicated that youth representatives were more proactive in communicating organizational plans to village officials and participating in community forums. Village authorities, in turn, acknowledged clearer coordination and improved organizational readiness among youth groups. This suggests that leadership strengthening at the organizational level can enhance institutional trust and collaboration between youth organizations and local governance systems.

Despite these positive developments, the program also revealed several challenges that warrant critical reflection. Differences in digital literacy levels among participants affected the pace of adaptation to digital organizational tools. While some youth members quickly embraced digital coordination, others required additional guidance and support (Figure 3). Moreover, sustaining organizational motivation beyond the facilitation period emerged as a potential concern, as enthusiasm tended to fluctuate in the absence of continuous mentoring. These challenges highlight that leadership strengthening is not a one-time intervention but a continuous process requiring institutional support and follow-up mechanisms.

Figure 3. Reflection and Evaluation Meeting

Overall, the results indicate that integrating participatory leadership strengthening with adaptive communication practices can effectively enhance youth organizational capacity in rural contexts. The program's impact is best understood not through immediate quantitative outputs, but through qualitative transformations in organizational culture, leadership perception, and participatory behavior. Such transformations are essential foundations for sustainable youth empowerment and community development, particularly in villages undergoing gradual social and digital change (Asrijal et al., 2024). The Results section should be clear and succinct. Rather than presenting extensive data, it should summarize the key scientific findings. Any differences between the results and those of previous studies should be highlighted. The Discussion should delve into the significance of the findings rather than simply restating them. The Results and Discussion sections may be either integrated or presented separately. Extensive citations and detailed discussions of existing literature should be avoided.

Conclusion

This community-based program was designed to address the declining leadership capacity and organizational participation among youth in Mejoyo Village within the context of increasing social and digital transformation. The findings demonstrate that participatory leadership strengthening, when combined with adaptive organizational communication practices, can effectively respond to these challenges. Rather than merely enhancing technical skills, the program contributed to a deeper

transformation in how youth perceive leadership, participation, and collective responsibility within community organizations. The study contributes to existing knowledge on youth empowerment and community development by reaffirming the importance of participatory approaches in strengthening rural youth organizations. While previous community service initiatives often focus on short-term training outputs, this program highlights the significance of leadership internalization and organizational culture change as key indicators of success. The results suggest that leadership should be understood not as an individual attribute, but as a collective and relational process embedded in everyday organizational practices. This perspective extends the discourse on youth leadership development by emphasizing sustainability through shared ownership and collaboration.

From a practical standpoint, the program offers an applicable model for strengthening youth organizations in rural settings facing similar challenges. The integration of participatory discussions, reflective learning, and flexible communication mechanisms demonstrates that leadership development can be effectively aligned with the lived realities of youth. These approaches may be replicated or adapted by village governments, educational institutions, and community organizations seeking to revitalize youth participation and enhance civic engagement at the local level.

In terms of policy implications, the findings underscore the need for village governance frameworks to recognize youth organizations as strategic partners in community development rather than auxiliary actors. Local governments are encouraged to provide institutional support, mentorship schemes, and access to digital infrastructure that enable youth organizations to sustain leadership regeneration and organizational continuity. Embedding youth leadership programs within village development planning may strengthen long-term community resilience and participatory governance.

Future research and community engagement initiatives should explore longitudinal approaches to assess the sustainability of leadership transformations over time. Further studies may also examine comparative models across different village contexts to identify factors that influence the effectiveness of participatory leadership interventions. Additionally, integrating quantitative indicators alongside qualitative insights could enrich the evaluation of organizational impact and provide a more comprehensive understanding of youth empowerment dynamics in rural communities. In conclusion, this study demonstrates that participatory leadership strengthening is not merely a programmatic intervention, but a strategic approach to cultivating resilient, adaptive, and inclusive youth organizations. By situating leadership development within a participatory and context-sensitive framework, community-based initiatives can contribute meaningfully to both academic discourse and practical efforts toward sustainable rural development.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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