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PKBM Pelita Riau Communication Planning in Improving Positive Image of Nonformal Education

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the study: Nonformal education institutions, particularly Pusat Kegiatan Belajar Masyarakat (PKBM), face persistent challenges in public perception due to negative stereotypes, inadequate governmental support, and limited infrastructure. PKBM Pelita Riau, located in Pekanbaru, Riau Province, Indonesia, represents a case study in how strategic communication planning can address these image deficits and enhance the positive standing of nonformal education in the community. This study aimed to describe and analyze the communication planning process employed by PKBM Pelita Riau in improving its positive image, encompassing five key stages: research, planning, execution, measurement/evaluation, and reporting.

Materials and methods: A qualitative descriptive approach was adopted. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation involving the head of PKBM Pelita Riau, active tutors for Packages A, B, and C, and community members. Data validity was ensured through triangulation techniques, and analysis followed data reduction and conclusion-drawing procedures.

Results: Findings revealed a five-stage communication planning framework at PKBM Pelita Riau: (1) Problem identification including negative community perceptions and low government participation; (2) Strategic planning with socialization activities such as mobile reading gardens and educational film screenings; (3) Execution through both direct and media-based community communication; (4) Evaluation to minimize identified problems; and (5) Reporting as a basis for future program development.

Conclusions: PKBM Pelita Riau demonstrates that structured, multi-stage communication planning can meaningfully improve community perception of nonformal education. However, sustained improvement requires increased governmental participation and resource allocation.

Keywords

communication planning; nonformal education; PKBM; institutional image; community perception; qualitative research.

INTRODUCTION

Communication in organizational settings is inherently challenged by a range of barriers, making systematic communication planning indispensable. Planning enables institutions to overcome obstacles and achieve communicative effectiveness, whether for image building, marketing, dissemination of ideas, or infrastructure development (Harjanto, 2010). In the context of educational institutions, communication planning is especially critical given the reputational dimensions of educational quality.

Nonformal education in Indonesia occupies a legally mandated but socially undervalued space within the national education system. Under Law Number 20 of 2003 on the National Education System (SISDIKNAS), Article 13 Paragraph 1, education pathways include formal, nonformal, and informal tracks that are mutually complementary. Nonformal education encompasses Equivalency Education Programs (Package A equivalent to elementary school, Package B equivalent to junior high school, and Package C equivalent to senior high school), delivered through institutions such as PKBM (Pusat Kegiatan Belajar Masyarakat, or Community Learning Activity Centers).

PKBM is defined by Government Regulation No. 17 of 2010, Article 1 Paragraph 33, as a nonformal education unit that organizes various learning activities according to community needs. According to UNESCO, PKBM is a community-based educational institution established outside the formal education system, directed at the community itself to develop various learning models aimed at improving the quality of community life (Mustafa Kamal, 2009). Despite this formal recognition, PKBM faces persistent challenges in public image, especially compared to formal educational institutions.

Critical Examination of Existing Literature

The concept of institutional image (*citra*) is defined as a reflection of an organization's identity in the eyes of its various publics (Ardianto, 2011). Image is inherently subjective, formed through accumulated knowledge and experience, and while it cannot be measured systematically, its effects are tangible in terms of institutional reception and participation rates.

Communication planning theory, as articulated by Kaufman (1972, as cited in Harjanto, 2010), defines planning as a deliberate, continuous process of identifying where an organization needs to go, the conditions required to get there, and the means by which those goals will be achieved. Applied to institutional image management, this framework prescribes a structured approach to diagnosing image problems, designing interventions, implementing solutions, and evaluating outcomes.

Research on PKBM institutions in Indonesia reveals recurring patterns: communities value PKBM for providing educational access to marginalized populations including school dropouts, the economically disadvantaged, and adults outside the school system (Rulam Ahmadi, 2016). Simultaneously, PKBM institutions are stigmatized by perceptions of low academic rigor, unruly students, and certificates that are assumed to be of lesser value for employment or higher education. According to Eko Jatmiko Sukarso of the Ministry of Education and Culture (cited in the book "Membangun Indonesia Lewat Keberagaman"), nonformal education has long been neglected and treated as a secondary concern.

Identification of Research Gaps

While significant literature exists on nonformal education effectiveness and PKBM organizational management, few studies have examined the specific communication planning strategies employed by PKBM institutions to counteract negative public perceptions. The intersection of institutional communication, image management, and nonformal educational settings remains underexplored, particularly in the Indonesian context. This study addresses that gap by providing an in-depth analysis of PKBM Pelita Riau's communication planning process.

Rationale for the Research

PKBM Pelita Riau in Pekanbaru, Riau Province, represents a particularly relevant case study. The institution has achieved notable recognition, including second place at the provincial level and first place at the national level in PKBM competitions. Its chairman, Mr. Adimir A. Baluka, holds multiple prominent positions in nonformal education governance, including as head of DPD FK TPK Riau Province and as an assessor for BAN PAUD and PNF. Despite these achievements, the institution continues to operate within a broader environment of community skepticism toward nonformal education, making its communication planning strategies worthy of scholarly examination.

Objectives

The primary objective of this study was to describe and analyze the communication planning process of PKBM Pelita Riau in improving the positive image of nonformal education, focusing on the research, planning, execution, evaluation, and reporting stages of the communication cycle.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Participants

Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure informational richness and relevance. The study involved three categories of informants: (1) the head/chairman of PKBM Pelita Riau (key institutional decision-maker); (2) active tutors for Package A, B, and C programs (frontline educational staff); and (3) community members residing in the surrounding area (primary audience of institutional communication). A total of 8 participants were involved, comprising 1 institutional head, 4 active tutors (one per educational package plus one administrative tutor), and 3 community members.

Table 1. Participant Characteristics

| Participant Category | Number | Role in Study |
|------------------------------------|--------|---------------------------------|
| <i>Institutional Head</i> | 1 | Primary institutional informant |
| <i>Active Tutors (Pkg A, B, C)</i> | 4 | Program-level informants |
| <i>Community Members</i> | 3 | External perception informants |
| <i>Total</i> | 8 | — |

Study Organization

The study was conducted at PKBM Pelita Riau, Pekanbaru, Riau Province, Indonesia. Data collection took place over a period of approximately three months, during which the researcher conducted field observations, structured and semi-structured interviews, and collected institutional documents. PKBM Pelita Riau was selected because of its documented history of community engagement, competitive achievements, and the leadership profile of its chairman, which provided a rich context for studying communication planning in nonformal education.

Test and Measurement Procedures

Data were collected through three primary instruments. First, in-depth interviews were conducted with all participant categories using semi-structured interview guides tailored to each informant group. Questions explored perceptions of PKBM's image, communication strategies employed, institutional challenges, and outcomes of communication activities. Second, non-participant observation was conducted during PKBM activities including teaching sessions, community outreach events, and administrative meetings. Observation notes were recorded using a structured observation protocol. Third, documentation analysis included review of institutional planning documents, activity reports, program schedules, and available promotional materials.

Statistical Analysis

Given the qualitative nature of the study, statistical analysis was not applicable. Data analysis followed an inductive qualitative approach using descriptive analysis procedures: (1) data collection, involving the gathering of all interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents; (2) data reduction, wherein relevant data were selected, focused, and condensed; and (3) conclusion drawing/verification, where patterns were identified and interpreted in light of communication planning theory. Member checking was employed to enhance credibility, whereby key informants reviewed summary interpretations for accuracy.

Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. Participants were informed of the study's purpose, their right to withdraw at any time without consequence, and assurances of confidentiality. Data were anonymized where appropriate. The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines of Universitas Islam Riau.

RESULTS

The findings from this study are organized according to the five-stage communication planning framework identified at PKBM Pelita Riau: research/problem identification, planning, execution, evaluation, and reporting. These stages emerged consistently across all data sources.

Stage 1: Research — Problem Identification

Cross-analysis of interview data and community observation revealed two primary categories of problems confronting PKBM Pelita Riau's image. The first category involved negative community perceptions toward nonformal education, including beliefs that PKBM certificates were not recognized for higher education or employment, that students were undisciplined, that academic standards were lower than formal schools, and that PKBM offered certificates without genuine educational engagement. The second major problem was insufficient governmental participation in providing institutional support, including financial donations, facilities, infrastructure, and equipment.

Table 2. Community Perceptions of PKBM Pelita Riau

| Perception Type | Description | Frequency (Mentioned by Participants) |
|-----------------|---|---------------------------------------|
| Positive | PKBM helps school dropouts and economically disadvantaged communities | 7/8 (87.5%) |
| Positive | Provides accessible education for adults outside school system | 6/8 (75.0%) |
| Negative | Certificates not valid for higher education or employment | 5/8 (62.5%) |
| Negative | Students perceived as undisciplined or academically weak | 5/8 (62.5%) |
| Negative | Certificate obtained without genuine learning engagement | 4/8 (50.0%) |
| Negative | Inadequate facilities and infrastructure | 6/8 (75.0%) |

Stage 2: Planning

Following problem identification, PKBM Pelita Riau designed a strategic communication plan with two primary intervention axes. The first was educational quality enhancement, operationalized through eight institutional standards: graduation standards, content standards, process standards, management standards, educator and educational staff standards, infrastructure standards, financing standards, and evaluation standards. The second was community socialization, planned through regular outreach activities including monthly mobile reading garden programs (*taman bacaan keliling*) and scheduled educational film screenings (*layar tancap*) featuring content about nonformal education, with students participating directly.

Stage 3: Execution

The execution phase employed both direct and mediated communication strategies. Direct communication included face-to-face socialization with community members, active student participation in local competitions and community events, and visits by institutional representatives to community gatherings. Mediated communication encompassed the distribution of educational materials, promotional participation in local media, and involvement in training events at city, provincial, and national levels. The institution's consistent participation in PKBM competitions, resulting in second place at the provincial level and first place nationally, served as high-visibility credibility signals to both the community and policy-makers.

Table 3. Communication Strategies Employed by PKBM Pelita Riau

| Strategy Type | Activity | Target Audience | Frequency |
|------------------------|--|--------------------------------|-----------------|
| Direct Communication | Community socialization events | General community | Monthly |
| Direct Communication | Student participation in competitions | Community and institutions | Annual/Periodic |
| Direct Communication | Mobile reading garden (<i>taman bacaan keliling</i>) | Community | Monthly |
| Mediated Communication | Educational film screening (<i>layar tancap</i>) | Community | Periodic |
| Mediated Communication | Training participation (city/province/national) | Institutions and policy-makers | Annual |
| Mediated Communication | Media engagement and publication | Broader public | Ongoing |

Stage 4: Measurement/Evaluation

Evaluation procedures at PKBM Pelita Riau were conducted following major activities and at the end of program cycles. The evaluation process aimed to identify residual problems, assess the effectiveness of communication interventions, and minimize recurring image issues. Qualitative feedback from community members and program participants was gathered informally, with institutional leadership reviewing outcomes against planned objectives. The evaluation revealed that while direct socialization activities generated positive immediate responses, persistent structural barriers — particularly inadequate infrastructure and limited governmental support — continued to undermine long-term image improvement efforts.

Stage 5: Reporting

Institutional reports were compiled following program cycles and submitted to relevant educational authorities. These reports served dual functions: as accountability documents to the Dinas Pendidikan (City Education Office) and as internal planning documents informing subsequent program design. The head of PKBM Pelita Riau, through his multiple governance roles, used these reports to advocate for increased governmental participation in PKBM support. The reporting stage was thus identified as both a concluding and initiating element of the communication planning cycle.

DISCUSSION

Interpreting Research Outcomes

The findings of this study confirm that PKBM Pelita Riau employs a structured, cyclical approach to communication planning consistent with established models in organizational communication and public relations literature. The five-stage framework observed at PKBM Pelita Riau aligns closely with the RPIE (Research, Planning, Implementation, Evaluation) model widely employed in public relations practice (Hendrix et al., 2013), suggesting that institutional communication in nonformal educational settings benefits from the same systematic approaches used in corporate and nonprofit communication management. The dual nature of community perceptions — simultaneously positive regarding accessibility and negative regarding quality and credibility — mirrors findings in studies of other developing-world nonformal education systems, where structural marginalization of nonformal education tracks produces self-reinforcing cycles of stigmatization (Hoppers, 2006). This finding underscores the importance of targeting both perceptual and structural factors in institutional communication strategies.

Evaluation Against Prior Research

The current study's findings build upon and extend prior research on PKBM effectiveness and community engagement in Indonesia (Kamil, 2009; Sutaryat, 2003). While existing literature has documented PKBM's structural and programmatic dimensions, this study provides empirical evidence of a specific communication planning process at the institutional level. The finding that student participation in competitions and community events constitutes a high-impact credibility strategy aligns with social proof theory (Cialdini, 2001), wherein observable behavioral evidence counters negative stereotypes more effectively than direct messaging. The identified gap between communication planning quality and governmental support levels resonates with macro-level analyses of nonformal education policy in Indonesia (Rulam Ahmadi, 2016), which highlight that the effectiveness of PKBM-level initiatives is constrained by systemic policy and resource allocation issues that individual institutions cannot resolve through communication planning alone.

Implications of Findings

The study's findings carry implications at multiple levels. At the institutional level, PKBM Pelita Riau's communication planning framework offers a replicable model for other PKBM institutions seeking to improve community standing. The combination of quality assurance through the eight educational standards and active community socialization represents a dual-track approach that addresses both substantive and perceptual dimensions of institutional image. At the policy level, the findings highlight the urgent need for increased governmental engagement with PKBM institutions, as communication planning alone cannot compensate for structural deficiencies in facilities and funding that community members directly observe and negatively evaluate.

Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the qualitative single-case design limits generalizability to other PKBM institutions, which may operate under different contextual conditions. Second, the relatively small participant sample, while appropriate for the qualitative approach, may not fully capture the diversity of community perceptions. Third, the absence of longitudinal data makes it difficult to assess the sustained impact of PKBM Pelita Riau's communication planning activities on community perceptions over time. Future research employing mixed methods and multi-site comparative designs would strengthen the evidence base.

Conclusion

This study provides an empirically grounded description and analysis of PKBM Pelita Riau's communication planning process in its efforts to improve the positive image of nonformal education. The institution employs a five-stage cyclical framework — research, planning, execution, evaluation, and reporting — that is consistent with established public relations and organizational communication models. Through dual strategies of internal quality enhancement (eight institutional standards) and external community socialization (mobile reading programs, film screenings, competition participation), PKBM Pelita Riau has made measurable progress in building credibility and visibility. However, the study also reveals that communication planning operates within structural constraints that individual institutions cannot fully transcend. The persistent lack of governmental support in the form of funding, facilities, and policy advocacy represents the primary ceiling on PKBM Pelita Riau's image improvement efforts. These findings call for a systemic response that complements institutional communication efforts with strengthened policy frameworks and resource commitments at the governmental level.

Future research is recommended to examine the longitudinal effects of sustained communication planning on community perceptions of PKBM institutions, to conduct multi-site comparative studies of communication planning approaches across different PKBM contexts, and to develop quantitative instruments for measuring image change in nonformal educational settings. Practitioners developing communication strategies for PKBM institutions are encouraged to adopt the five-stage framework documented in this study, while simultaneously engaging in advocacy for policy-level reforms.

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CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare no conflict of interest in relation to this study.

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