



## Communication Management Strategy in Implementing Recognition of Prior Learning to Enhance Village Officers' Competence in Indonesia

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### Abstract

*The State University of Surabaya (UNESA), the Ministry of Villages, Development of Disadvantaged Regions, and Transmigration, and the Bojonegoro Regency Government initiated an RPL program collaboration, offering opportunities to all village officials in Bojonegoro Regency who have not yet obtained a bachelor's degree to have their various experiences and work portfolios assessed against the learning outcomes of courses in higher education. This RPL program, specifically for village officials, is the first of its kind in Indonesia. So, it encourages researchers to use case study research methods. This research discusses the importance of communication management, as many actors and institutions within UNESA are responsible for implementing this RPL collaboration. The students from village officials studying at the undergraduate level in five study programs selected by UNESA. UNESA's communication management in managing RPL is evident in the inter-institutional communication content that regulates their respective duties and functions, so these institutions structurally have a coordinating function and are responsible to the Rector. The communication flow between institutions within UNESA is formally regulated, and its channels are written. Conversely, in the classroom between lecturers and RPL students, communication management is more equal in community service and joint research programs.*

**Keywords:** Recognition of Prior Learning, Communication, management.

**Paper type:** Research paper

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## **INTRODUCTION**

In order to enhance accessibility and ensure access to higher education as mandated by Law Number 20 of 2003 on the National Education System and Law Number 12 of 2012 on Higher Education of the Republic of Indonesia, the government is expected to provide the broadest possible opportunities for individuals who have undergone formal, non-formal, and informal education through lifelong learning facilities and to provide opportunities for the equivalence of certain qualifications.

The need for a general framework for the recognition and certification of competencies acquired in the workplace is increasingly growing in a continuously evolving world. Lifelong learning forms the foundation for the development of such a framework, where in adult education, learning and experience are gained after completing formal education (Velciu 2014). RPL emerges as an opportunity for individuals who have acquired experience from the workplace, training, and self-directed learning to continue and complete formal education through a series of assessments, as practiced in the United States (Klein-Collins and Wertheim 2013). In Sweden, the development of RPL has been underway in recent years, primarily focusing on vocational education for immigrants working in Sweden. The Swedish government focuses on developing methods for assessing competencies in vocational fields (Andersson, Fejes, and Ahn 2004). Furthermore, in subsequent research, Fejes and Andersson (2009) discuss the relationship between experience, learning, and recognition from a constructivist perspective, thus their analysis is more on the evaluation of the RPL system at the higher education assessor level in recognizing portfolios into course learning outcomes in higher education.

The experience of the State University of Surabaya (UNESA) in implementing the RPL program has been ongoing since 2021. It began in mid-2021 when the Directorate General of Learning and Student Affairs (Direktorat Belmawa) appointed UNESA to organize the RPL program along with several other universities. In the first year of RPL, 2021, there were a total of 201 applicants at UNESA, and only 126 were declared successful in the RPL process across 18 study programs at UNESA. However, eventually, only 76 participants re-registered and attended the RPL courses in 2021 at UNESA. This RPL program has become a

significant record and focus for the academic field of UNESA to ensure that the registration process and the quality of RPL courses at UNESA continue to improve and attract more participants. Therefore, evaluation and follow-up at each stage of RPL at UNESA are crucial points that will always be enhanced in the future.

At the beginning of 2022, the State University of Surabaya (UNESA) collaborated with the Bojonegoro Regency Government and the Ministry of Villages, Development of Disadvantaged Regions, and Transmigration (Kemendes PDTT) to implement the RPL program. In this program, all RPL participants were village officials in Bojonegoro Regency. The curriculum structure for RPL students is the same as the regular pathway and is directed with study materials on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for Villages. In this program, UNESA accepted 605 RPL Village students from Bojonegoro Regency, spread across five study programs related to the needs of villages in Bojonegoro Regency. The most distinctive difference between the study programs is the inclusion of SDG studies and the use of project-based learning, allowing students to solve problems in coursework and thesis research related to their workplace issues and context (Gredley 2022).

Therefore, communication management within UNESA and its partner institutions needs to be studied in the development of RPL. This research should serve as a foundation for developing RPL at UNESA, aiming for improvements in its process and quality. Moreover, this year, UNESA is providing opportunities for other local governments to become partners in implementing the RPL program. Thus, research on organizational communication management based on Taylor in Miller (2015:25) is expected to focus on communication issues, the direction of communication flow, channels, and UNESA's communication style in developing project-based learning methods applied in RPL courses, and what needs to be evaluated in RPL courses, from both the lecturer and student perspectives (Singh and Ehlers 2019).

Communication management is also a strategic study because the RPL program within UNESA involves many institutional actors, including the RPL Center, the Directorate of Academics, the Center for Technology and Information Systems, the Directorate of Finance, Faculties, and the five study programs running the RPL in collaboration with the Bojonegoro Regency Government. According to Weick (1998), communication within an organization needs to be managed to

achieve mutual understanding among various stakeholders. The involvement of many internal UNESA institutions in the RPL program requires collaborative synergy to ensure that this first-time RPL program for village officials remains orderly from an academic standpoint and strategic for human resource development in rural areas (Simões 2021).

## **METHODS**

This research method is a case study with a qualitative approach. The case study method is more appropriate because, in 2022, UNESA was the first institution to collaborate in organizing a special RPL program for village officials. The strength of qualitative research lies in its ability to provide complex textual descriptions of how experiences become unique issues analyzed in research based on scientific perspectives. The case study is intended to improve and understand the success of the issues faced in the RPL program. The RPL mechanism program is an effort by the government to address the significant need for village officials to obtain formal education to enhance competencies, develop careers, and improve the quality of public services.

The subjects of this study involve five study programs at UNESA: the Non-Formal Education undergraduate program, the Public Administration undergraduate program, the Accounting undergraduate program, the Management undergraduate program, and the Sociology undergraduate program. The data collected in this study include primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews, observations, and Focus Group Discussions (FGD) within UNESA, related institutions include the RPL Center, the Directorate of Academics, the Directorate of Finance, the Center for Technology and Information Systems, Dean of Faculties, and five study programs implementing RPL. Secondary data were obtained through a review of RPL program documents. This study uses data validity in the form of data source triangulation. Source triangulation is done by cross-checking data from other sources, namely comparing data obtained from in-depth interviews with the results of observations, FGDs, and document reviews.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Frederick Taylor (1911) explained that management within organizations, between leaders and staff, can build functional work relationships through coordinated and evaluative communication processes. Communication between leaders of internal institutions related to the RPL program at UNESA involves regular monthly coordination and evaluation. The goal is to ensure that the outcomes of the RPL program enable students to engage in project-based learning and to provide beneficial value in their respective village work areas. This monthly coordination and evaluation are necessary because the RPL program, with input from village officials, is being implemented on a large scale for the first time across five study programs at UNESA. From the initial intake of new students through the RPL pathway to graduation, coordination and evaluation meetings consistently produce follow-up plans related to strengthening the academic performance of RPL students (Stevahn et al. 2020).

Communication management within UNESA's RPL program involves several institutions with functional duties and authorities, including the RPL Center, the Directorate of Academics, the Center for Technology and Information Systems, the Directorate of Finance, faculties, and the five study programs collaborating with Bojonegoro Regency: the Undergraduate Program in Non-Formal Education, the Undergraduate Program in Public Administration, the Undergraduate Program in Accounting, the Undergraduate Program in Management, and the Undergraduate Program in Sociology (Pokorny et al. 2017).

The UNESA RPL Center plays a vital role in the development and expansion of the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) program by actively seeking and fostering partnerships with external organizations. This center is responsible for the careful selection of new RPL students, ensuring that only the most qualified candidates are admitted to the program. Furthermore, it is dedicated to maintaining the highest quality standards for the RPL curriculum and actively collaborates with both internal departments and external institutions that partner with UNESA.

Meanwhile, the Directorate of Academics at UNESA is committed to supporting students throughout their academic journey, starting from enrollment. They work diligently to create academic policies that are on par with those of traditional educational pathways, offering students a seamless experience. Additionally, the directorate oversees the graduation process, ensuring that all

students receive the recognition they deserve for their hard work and achievements. The Center for Technology and Information Systems provides a web-based information system known as SIM RPL UNESA for registration, portfolio uploads, assessments, and graduation information for RPL students. The Directorate of Finance manages tuition fees, remunerates lecturers and RPL staff, and provides facilities such as student uniforms and ID cards during their studies at UNESA. According to Giri (2016), the contribution of facilities and infrastructure is crucial in supporting the quality of education, which is always a focus of attention. Faculties manage classes and the learning process for RPL students. The study programs deliver RPL courses and mentor students (Baumeler 2023).

UNESA considers the work experience of RPL applicants in determining the extent to which their learning achievements can be recognized. This decision aligns with similar case studies in the United States, which began in 1974. According to Klein and Wertheim (2013), Excelsior University in New York and Thomas Edison University in New Jersey recognized work portfolios with course credits based on work experience portfolios. Similarly, in Australia, according to Pryor (2012), nurses could enhance their competencies through work experience in hospitals and transfer credits from vocational nursing education to bachelor's degree programs. The increasing ability of universities to connect learning outcomes with work portfolios is also explained by Kamenetz (2012) (Calderon and Sood 2018).

Therefore, UNESA requested the Bojonegoro Regency Government to regulate applicants for the RPL pathway. An agreement was reached that village heads could only register for the Undergraduate Program in Management to strengthen their managerial skills. BUMDES managers must register for the Undergraduate Program in Accounting to master financial management in BUMDES. Village Secretaries should register for the Undergraduate Program in Public Administration. Village activists could register for the Undergraduate Program in Sociology or the Undergraduate Program in Non-Formal Education to strengthen their knowledge of community development and social programs. The RPL registration for Bojonegoro at the State University of Surabaya began in February 2022, specifically in the Even Semester of 2021/2022. The Bojonegoro Regency Government selected village officials who were eligible to register for the

RPL pathway at UNESA. A total of 759 people were recommended by the Bojonegoro Regency Government to register for the RPL pathway at UNESA. Following portfolio selection and interviews by UNESA assessors, 605 applicants were declared successful. In the assessment process, UNESA trained RPL assessors from each study program, with each program having three assessors, except for the Undergraduate Program in Public Administration, which had six assessors due to the large number of applicants. Miller (2015) explains that classical management communication requires specific assignments accompanied by special training and education to ensure individuals have the skills aligned with organizational goals. Similarly, the RPL Center designed assessor training to align perceptions in evaluating RPL applicants, following technical guidelines on RPL issued by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Travers and Evans 2011).

Assessment involves evaluating the portfolios of RPL applicants to determine whether they have achieved the specific competencies aligned with the learning outcomes of the targeted study program. The selection of assessors is based on the program chair and faculty members who are most knowledgeable about the curriculum structure, as all evaluations are based on the study program's curriculum. Hamalik (2010) explains that the curriculum is a design aimed at guiding expected graduates. The selection of assessors is decided through a written decree from the Rector. Subsequently, the Directorate of Academics at UNESA issued the Rector's Decree Number: 317/UN38/HK/KM/2022 on March 18, 2022, regarding the Determination of Students Who Passed the RPL New Student Selection Cooperation Program between UNESA and the Ministry of Villages, Development of Disadvantaged Regions, and Transmigration and the Bojonegoro Regency Government for the Even Semester 2021/2022, totaling 605 participants. The Directorate of Academics announced the re-registration for selected students to complete their personal data as a requirement to obtain a Student Identification Number (NIM). RPL Bojonegoro participants were required to fill out their biodata following the re-registration Announcement Number: B/17309/UN38.I/TU.00.02/2022.

Thus, all communication channels in the RPL program management are formal, either through written decisions of the Rector or Vice Rector. Taylor, as cited by Miller (2025), explains that this condition reflects absolute decisions based

on institutional decisions with a classical management communication approach, from the determination of assessors, selection schedules, selection results, to re-registration requirements for RPL applicants who have passed the selection.

In the implementation of RPL (Recognition of Prior Learning) courses, Janacsek, Fiser, and Nemeth (2012) explain that the model used is project-based learning. This is because RPL students have work experience as village officials and activists, allowing real-world issues relevant to their work to be brought into the classroom and discussed using academic theories from each study program. Interestingly, students can address coursework based on problems in their respective villages, which can be designed into assignments and theses. This creates a more concrete contribution between RPL courses and the development of village programs in Bojonegoro Regency. This approach aligns with what Gibson and Ivancevich (1996) stated: RPL can bridge the gap between academic study and dynamic work experience, thereby strengthening scientific knowledge and enhancing individual competencies in the workplace. Furthermore, the model aligns with the findings of Ali et al. (2018), who emphasized that project-based approaches within RPL effectively assess and validate practical experience, especially within professional training programs such as engineering, which requires structured, real-world applications to support competency validation (Ali et al., 2018).

The course concept by the implementing study programs of Bojonegoro's RPL takes into account several considerations. For the Undergraduate Program in Public Administration (PA), a WhatsApp (WA) group is used to invite sub-district coordinators. The Head of the PA Undergraduate Program appoints sub-district coordinators to handle coordination regarding assignments, lecture issues, and student affairs, facilitating communication between RPL students and lecturers.

The communication management characteristics during the course process differ from the classical approach used in the initial RPL registration, where every decision was based on written instructions from UNESA leaders. Each course lecturer creates a WhatsApp group to discuss course preparations interactively with students. During the even semester of 2021-2022 and the odd semester of 2022-2023, classes were still conducted online due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

The Public Administration Undergraduate Program initially met with RPL student sub-district coordinators to discuss class distribution to make course access easier for students, especially for completing assignments. Classes were formed based on geographical considerations, even if they were from different sub-districts. Synchronous sessions were conducted using Google Meet and the Vinesa website, while WhatsApp groups and Google Classroom were used for each course for coordination and assignment submission.

Additionally, there were lectures with practitioner lecturers on June 23, 25, and 29, 2022, involving leaders from the Ministry of Villages, Development of Disadvantaged Regions, and Transmigration. In-person lectures for the PA Undergraduate Program were held in week 14 on July 14, 2022, in Buildings I2 and I3 of the Faculty of Social Sciences and Law at UNESA. Generally, the results achieved through this method showed that RPL students actively participated in discussions and learning. Students were also grouped to facilitate understanding and optimize various learning materials. The case studies presented in the lectures referred to the course material (course topics) and were linked to their ongoing activities and the achievement of the village SDGs.

This approach connects real tasks relevant to each RPL student's job, discussed in groups. Students' learning experiences and concepts are built based on the products they create through project-based learning. Among the outputs produced by RPL students are written reports that are presented.

**Figure 1.**

**Community Service Program by Lecturers of the Undergraduate**



*Source :Program in Public Administration in a Village in Bojonegoro Regency*

RPL students are also involved in the Research and Community Service (PKM) conducted by lecturers of the Undergraduate Program in Public Administration. RPL students participated in the PKM: Digital Finance Training for the community of Rendeng Village, Malo Subdistrict, Bojonegoro Regency. Their involvement in community service programs in several villages in Bojonegoro Regency enhances their competency in solving village issues based on the scientific field of public administration. Thus, the RPL program further solidifies the Merdeka Belajar and Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) concepts implemented by UNESA with village officials in Bojonegoro Regency.

Students of the Undergraduate Program in Public Administration are highly enthusiastic about attending lectures, as evidenced by their active participation, inquiries, and experience sharing, which often extend the duration of the lectures. Village leaders are very supportive, providing motivation, opportunities, and dispensations to attend classes, even though they sometimes have to fulfill their duties at the village office. Despite occasional signal issues during online lectures, requiring students to find better internet connectivity, challenges persist, including difficulties in submitting Mid-Semester Test (UTS), assignments, and Final Semester Test (UAS) by some students who do not respond or show sufficient commitment. Academic advisors communicate with these students, and if no improvement is seen, the RPL Center team and the Village Community Empowerment Office (PMD) of Bojonegoro Regency coordinate to evaluate them.

**Figure 2.**  
**Principles of Management Lecture, Undergraduate Program in Public Administration**



**Figure 3.**  
**Public Lecture Organized by RPL Students of the Undergraduate Program**  
**in Public Administration in Bojonegoro**



RPL (Recognition of Prior Learning) courses are not just about delivering theoretical knowledge but also address issues faced by students in their workplaces. These issues are analyzed and solutions are designed based on the academic knowledge from their study programs. This approach provides RPL students with extensive learning experiences:

Firstly, Project-Based Learning: The coursework is tailored to the specific issues faced in each student's village work. These issues are incorporated into assignments and theses, thus ensuring that the practical work experience students already have is enriched with academic perspectives. This approach aligns with initiatives that emphasize practical engagement with local community and industry partnerships to facilitate learning outcomes (Roy and Marsafawy 2021). Additionally, service learning frameworks that integrate community-focused learning have shown to enhance students' engagement and problem-solving abilities, bridging academic theories with real-world applications (Filges et al. 2021). Secondly, Practical Lectures: The program includes lectures from high-level officials from the Ministry of Villages, Development of Disadvantaged Regions, and Transmigration (Kemendesa PDTT), who bring extensive experience and understanding of government policies in rural development. Thirdly, Community Service Programs: Students gain experience through community service programs conducted by their lecturers. This is crucial as it allows villages to benefit from academic innovations and program transfers that help develop competencies needed

for rural development. Such service-learning approaches in community-based research support student skill development and community empowerment (Horning et al. 2020). Programs that encourage civic engagement through service also strengthen both practical skills and social responsibility (Cheng 2018). Fourthly, Research and Publication: Students also engage in research and publications with their lecturers. This exposure helps them become more critical and scientific in solving village issues according to their field of study.

The implementation of RPL courses for students in Bojonegoro across four semesters in the Undergraduate Program in Non-Formal Education (PLS) has been satisfying, with all students graduating successfully. Interestingly, the RPL program does not only focus on student development but also indirectly contributes to the development of lecturers in terms of research grants and community service. In the Undergraduate Program in Non-Formal Education (PLS), there are 5 PKM (Community Service Program) projects conducted in the locations where RPL students are based, along with 2 policy research projects from the faculty and 1 research project from BRIN. This context also leads to an enhancement in the quality of PLS lecturers, as these research activities positively impact their academic reputation.

**Figure 4.**

**Research grants and Community Services of the Undergraduate Program in Non-Formal Education (PLS) in Bojonegoro Funded by BRIN**



RPL students in the Undergraduate Program in Non-Formal Education (PLS) also participate in in-person lectures at the Faculty of Educational Sciences (FIP) at UNESA. This allows for better interaction between lecturers and students, and helps students become familiar with the academic environment of the PLS program. The enthusiasm and engagement of students in these in-person sessions have been notably positive. As a result, RPL courses are also held in-person by either inviting students to UNESA or facilitating PLS lecturers to travel to Bojonegoro to deliver lectures or supervise theses.

**Figure 5.**

**In-Person Lectures at UNESA by RPL Students in the Undergraduate Program in Non-Formal Education (PLS)**



The partnership between Kemendes PDTT and UNESA within the RPL program was brought to life through a series of engaging practitioner lectures. These lectures were delivered by high-ranking officials from Kemendes PDTT, who shared their wealth of knowledge and experience with RPL students.

In the specific study program identified as S1 PLS, three informative sessions were held as part of the human resource development course. These lectures took place over three consecutive meetings, showcasing the officials' expertise and practical insights. Spanning from June to July, this initiative covered all study programs involved in the Bojonegoro RPL.

The structure of these lectures proved to be immensely beneficial for RPL students. By facilitating direct exchanges with seasoned bureaucrats from the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, students were able to absorb valuable lessons and real-world experiences. This knowledge transfer not only enriched their learning but also provided crucial insights for village officials in the

Bojonegoro district, enhancing their capacity to serve their communities effectively. The S1 Management Study Program implements RPL Bojonegoro lectures with the *project-based learning method*, which is a model of project-based learning centered on students who designate lecturers as facilitators. As for the learning media used, namely *powerpoint* (PPT), zoom link, modules, Gmail, Google Drive, and WAG. The concept of lectures carried out is *hybrid*, namely offline and online meetings. Especially in semesters three and four, the intensity of offline lectures is more, because students need to guide thesis proposals and theses. The concept of offline lectures can be carried out with lecturers present in classrooms that have been prepared by the Bojonegoro PMD Office, or lectures can be carried out at UNESA or in each faculty.

The lecture process in the S1 Management study program has been carefully designed with a block system to support project-based learning lectures. According to Fathurrohman (2016:119), project-based learning is a learning model that uses projects or activities to achieve competence in attitudes, knowledge, and skills. Meanwhile, Saefudin and Berdiati (2014, p. 58) argue that *project-based learning* is a learning method that uses problems as the first step in collecting and integrating new knowledge based on their experience in real activities.

The *Project Based Learning* (PBL) model is a learning model that challenges students to "learn how to learn", working in groups to find solutions to real-world problems. In the first semester, students have been designed to enter the block class, which is targeted to identify research problems in their field of work as village apparatus; then students are accompanied by lecturers in charge of their courses to analyze according to the approach, scientific concepts, until finally solving solutions from the research analysis discussed, so that they can be useful and applied in the work of village apparatus.

At the beginning of each semester, the S1 Management Study Program holds several meetings to guide and discuss *project-based learning plans*; this activity is called a workshop. In the next activity, the lecturer guided students in research and program development on research problems. The creation of this program is called the Activity Plan Report (LRK). Lecturers not only assist in designing research but also guide students in the implementation of LRK in the village. Most importantly,

the LRK of each student is designed and implemented based on the principle of problems in the village and the village program budget so that solving this solution can have a greater impact on the village community.

After the RPL students of the S1 Management Study Program carry out the implementation of LRK, then the next students are required to prepare an Activity Plan Report. Next, the team of field assistant lecturers in each course assesses student course assignments since the workshop, designing the LRK, implementing the LRK, LRK reports, and presenting reports. Accumulation at each of these stages, then the next is the value of each course. That way, the implementation of students in the *project-based learning lecture model* can be transparent and have a beneficial impact on development in the village.

Next, in the S1 Accounting study program in semesters one and two, some students are not actively attending lectures so they do not graduate. The reasons for the absence of lectures vary more than the lack of commitment to fulfill lecture obligations even though they have received scholarships from the Bojonegoro Regency PMD Office. Routine coordination once a month, the RPL center conveys the progress of tasks and the presence of RPL students in lectures to the Bojonegoro Regency PMD Office, with the hope that UNESA and the Bojonegoro Regency Government can both remind students who are still lacking in lectures. Even so, there are still students who do not graduate from lectures.

Coordination between study programs, the UNESA RPL center, and the Bojonegoro Regency PMD Office is routinely carried out at least once to twice a month, especially when the intensity is increased to three times a month before graduation in the fourth semester. This goal is carried out so that RPL Bojonegoro students can be monitored very optimally in the lecture process and thesis guidance. Regular coordination in such academic settings has proven crucial for the improvement of learning outcomes and the effective management of student progress, especially in programs involving multi-institutional collaboration (Boza et al., 2020; Lewis et al., 2019). This condition is encouraged because RPL students are expected to graduate in the fourth semester. However, in the end, out of 599 students of RPL Bojonegoro, there are 582 students who can graduate in September 2023. The other 17 students still need to take lectures in their respective study programs to complete lectures that have not yet graduated.

In addition, the collaboration between the Ministry of Villages, Development of Disadvantaged Regions, and Transmigration (Kemendes PDTT) and UNESA in the RPL program is also realized through practical lectures delivered by high-level officials from Kemendes PDTT. For instance, in the Undergraduate Program in Non-Formal Education (PLS), there were three practical lectures by Kemendes PDTT officials for three sessions on human resource development courses. These practical lectures were conducted from June to July across all study programs implementing RPL in Bojonegoro. This lecture format is highly valuable for RPL students, allowing them to benefit from the experience of Kemendes PDTT officials and apply this learning to their roles as village officials in Bojonegoro Regency.

The Undergraduate Program in Management implements the RPL program in Bojonegoro using a project-based learning method. This model centers on students, with lecturers acting as facilitators. The learning media used includes PowerPoint (PPT), Zoom links, modules, Gmail, Google Drive, and WhatsApp Groups (WAG). The course concept is hybrid, involving both in-person and online meetings. Specifically, in the third and fourth semesters, there is a higher frequency of in-person classes due to the need for thesis proposals and thesis guidance. In-person lectures can be held in classrooms provided by the Bojonegoro PMD Office, at UNESA, or at the respective faculties.

The process of teaching in the Management program is well-designed with a block system to support project-based learning. According to Faturrohman (2016), project-based learning is a model that uses projects or activities as a means to achieve competencies in attitudes, knowledge, and skills. Saefudin and Berdiati (2014) argue that project-based learning is a method that uses problems as a starting point to gather and integrate new knowledge based on real-world activities. The Project-Based Learning (PBL) model challenges students to "learn how to learn" by working collaboratively to find solutions to real-world problems. This model's emphasis on active engagement and problem-solving is crucial for aligning academic activities with real-world issues, thereby enhancing student learning and engagement (Ali and Hasan 2023; Sutabri et al. 2019).

In the first semester, students are placed into block classes with the goal of identifying research problems within their work as village officials. They are then

guided by their lecturers to analyze these problems using academic approaches and concepts, ultimately developing solutions that are applicable and beneficial in their village work. At the start of each semester, the Undergraduate Program in Management conducts several meetings to guide and discuss the project-based learning plans. This process is known as a workshop. Following this, lecturers assist students with research and program development on the identified research issues. This program development is called the Activity Plan Report (Laporan Rencana Kegiatan, LRK). Lecturers not only support students in designing their research but also guide them in implementing the LRK in the village. Importantly, each student's LRK is designed and implemented based on the issues in their village and the village program budget, ensuring that the solutions significantly impact the community. After RPL students in the Management program implement their LRKs, they are required to compile an Activity Plan Report. The field lecturer team assesses student tasks from the workshop stage, LRK design, LRK implementation, LRK report, and report presentation. The accumulation of scores from these stages contributes to the final grade for each course. This ensures that the implementation of the project-based learning model by students is transparent and beneficial to village development (Izquierdo-Domenech et al. 2021).

In the Accounting program, during the first and second semesters, some students did not actively attend classes and consequently did not pass. The reasons for absences varied, mostly due to a lack of commitment to fulfill academic obligations despite receiving scholarships from the Bojonegoro PMD Office. The RPL Center routinely reports students' progress and attendance to the Bojonegoro PMD Office once a month, with the hope that both UNESA and the Bojonegoro government can remind students who are lagging behind. However, some students still failed to pass their courses. Coordination between the programs, the RPL Center at UNESA, and the Bojonegoro PMD Office is conducted regularly, at least once or twice a month, and more frequently—up to three times a month—leading up to graduation in the fourth semester. This increased coordination aims to ensure that RPL students in Bojonegoro are closely monitored throughout their coursework and thesis guidance. The goal is for RPL students to graduate in the fourth semester. Ultimately, out of 599 RPL students from Bojonegoro, 582 graduated in September 2023, while the remaining 17 students needed to complete their remaining coursework in their respective programs.

## **CONCLUSION**

The RPL program at UNESA runs smoothly because the internal institutions of UNESA carry out communication management functions that are formal and institutionally accountable. Therefore, each decision-making stage in the implementation of the RPL program is documented in leadership decrees. Such a systematic approach encourages the institutions involved in the RPL program to focus on their work professionally. However, the bureaucracy of RPL management is not always vertical, involving higher hierarchical institutions. Instead, the RPL program also reflects a coordinative relationship between institutions, allowing many RPL management decisions to be made promptly.

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enhanced the RPL experience and has had a lasting impact on our students and their communities.

Our appreciation extends to all RPL students who participated in this program. Their commitment and willingness to bridge professional experience with academic learning have been inspiring. We hope that the skills and knowledge gained will support them in their ongoing contributions to community and rural development. Finally, we would like to express our gratitude to the research team and support staff whose work on evaluation, communication management, and data collection has made this study possible. Thank you for your steadfast dedication to educational innovation and development.

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