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Capacity-Centred Intergovernmental Collaboration: Evidence from a Village Recognition of Prior Learning Programme in Bojonegoro

Muhammad Farid Ma'ruf^{1*}, Ardiyansah², Ajie Hanif Muzaqi³, and Tolentino de Araujo⁴

^{1,2,3}Department of Public Administration, Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Surabaya, Indonesia

⁴Universidade Nacional Timor Lorosa'e, Dili, Timor-Leste

*Correspondence author: muhammadfarid@unesa.ac.id

Abstract

This study examines how intergovernmental collaboration was organized through the Village Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) program implemented in Bojonegoro Regency and evaluates its contribution to strengthening village administrative capacity. A qualitative case-study approach was used, drawing on in-depth interviews with key institutional actors, field observations, program documentation, and the Nominal Group Technique. The findings indicate that collaboration successfully expanded access to higher education by integrating national policy direction, regional financing, university-based competency assessment, and workplace learning. Based on these findings, this study proposes a Capacity-Centred Intergovernmental Collaboration (CC-IGC). The model provides a practical governance framework for strengthening village administrative capacity while maintaining academic quality and supporting the long-term sustainability of intergovernmental collaboration in village capacity development.

Keywords: intergovernmental collaboration; village administrative capacity; recognition of prior learning.

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Address: Jalan Proklamasi 70, Central Jakarta, Indonesia 10320

Phone: +62 21 31928280/31928285

Fax: +62 21 31928281

E-mail:

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1. Introduction

Village administration in Indonesia has changed markedly since villages received wider authority over planning, budgeting, service delivery, and community development. That authority has also raised the competency threshold for village officials, who are expected to interpret regulation, manage public funds, organize local services, and make decisions that can be defended administratively. Recent Indonesian evidence indicates that administrative capacity is not a peripheral factor. It is associated with the ability of villages to translate funding and formal rules into program outcomes and accountable financial management (Indra & Khoirunurrofik, 2022; Cahyani et al., 2022). Training itself is not sufficient when learning is poorly matched to the actual work of village apparatus (Rohman et al., 2024). JISDeP research further shows that the availability of village services is closely connected with welfare conditions (Gaspersz, 2023). Strengthening village administrative capacity should therefore be read as a development concern rather than only a personnel issue.

The governance problem is also intergovernmental. National ministries set policy direction, regional governments control much of the financing and local implementation, universities hold academic authority, and villages absorb the day-to-day consequences. Recent central-local research shows that collaboration is shaped by functional allocation, fiscal relationships, frequency of contact, and actors' willingness to cooperate (Chung & Choi, 2022). The issue is not simply whether institutions meet or sign an agreement. Collaborative arrangements need an accountability architecture that makes responsibilities visible across the process (Lee & Ospina, 2022), while legitimacy depends in part on whether affected actors are represented and can see credible performance information (Lee & Esteve, 2023). Comparative work also warns that legitimacy and accountability do not arise automatically from collaboration (Cristofoli et al., 2022). These insights draw attention to who decides, who pays, who implements, and who can question the arrangement.

Many village officials bring years of public-service experience to the program but cannot easily enter a conventional degree route. Office hours, village meetings, urgent administrative work, travel, household responsibilities, and tuition costs compete with study. Research on working learners shows that recognition or credit for prior learning can reduce unnecessary repetition and connect formal education more closely with work when institutions provide clear pathways and support (Klein-Collins & Shafenberg, 2023). In the Indonesian planning context, institutional readiness similarly depends on the interaction of competent personnel, coordination, regulation, data, and continuity between policy periods (Cahyono et al., 2026). The policy challenge is therefore twofold: existing competence must be recognized credibly, and participants must still have realistic opportunities to develop the knowledge they do not yet possess.

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) addresses that challenge by asking institutions to judge learning acquired outside the conventional classroom. A recent systematic review identifies benefits in access and mobility, but also recurring problems in assessment, institutional processes, and policy consistency (Raciti et al., 2024). Assessment design matters because experiential knowledge is often tacit and context dependent; methods that rely too narrowly on documents may fail to capture what a candidate can actually do (de Paor, 2024). RPL also involves a translation process in which professional experience must be made legible to academic standards without stripping it of context (Pokorny, 2024). Recognition practices can widen participation only when fairness and inclusion are built into the process (Pastore et al., 2023). In this article, RPL is therefore treated as both an educational pathway and an institutional mechanism that must be governed across organizations.

The Bojonegoro program provides a useful setting because the actors were mutually dependent but held different mandates. The Ministry of Villages provided national direction; Bojonegoro Regency financed scholarships and coordinated local implementation; universities assessed prior learning and protected degree standards; and participants combined study with village duties. An earlier CIPP-based evaluation of this same program documented its context, inputs, implementation process, outputs, and several technical obstacles (Ma'ruf et al., 2024). The present article deliberately takes a different analytical route. Rather than repeating program evaluation, it examines how authority, financing, academic control, participant voice, and adaptive coordination were distributed across the intergovernmental arrangement.

Recent collaborative-governance scholarship suggests evaluating joint working by how it is organized, not by its presence alone. Reviews of collaborative innovation emphasize clear goals, leadership, stakeholder participation, information sharing, and communication tools as governance conditions for productive collaboration (Lopes & Farias, 2022). Central-local collaboration is also sensitive to fiscal relationships and collaborative attitudes (Chung & Choi, 2022). At the same time, collaborative structures can create legitimacy and accountability problems (Cristofoli et al., 2022; Lee & Ospina, 2022), and representation can affect how the arrangement is perceived by those outside the network (Lee & Esteve, 2023). Collaboration may even become excessive when interdependence is weak, and the costs of joint working exceed its benefits (Elston et al., 2023). Network composition is consequently important for performance (Kim & Sullivan, 2023). In JISDeP, research on institutional collaboration similarly highlights the importance of shared direction, complementary resources, and orchestration (Pratistha et al., 2026).

This article therefore treats village administrative capacity as the criterion against which collaboration should be judged. Evidence from Indonesian villages links administrative capacity to the implementation of public programs and the use of village funds (Indra & Khoirunurrofik, 2022), while competence and internal control are relevant to the quality of village financial management (Cahyani et al., 2022). Recent research also questions the assumption that repeated training automatically produces competent village apparatus, drawing attention to the design and relevance of learning itself (Rohman et al., 2024). For the RPL program, enrolment, signed agreements, and graduation are important outputs, but they are incomplete indicators. The stronger test is whether collaboration creates credible learning, supports application in the workplace, and improves the administrative confidence and routines of village government.

Digital delivery widened access but introduced a separate set of capacity requirements. Online participation depends on digital skills and institutional readiness, not simply the availability of an internet connection. Comparative evidence shows substantial inequality in students' digital readiness and skills (van de Werfhorst et al., 2022), while research on online learning identifies time management, learning conditions, technical barriers, and help-seeking as practical determinants of participation (Barrot et al., 2021). Digital transformation also changes the coordination demands placed on collaborative governance because communication and information increasingly move across shared platforms (Maulana & Dečman, 2023). In Indonesian settings, JISDeP studies show that skills, confidence, training, information systems, and institutional support shape the value generated by digital programs (Jatnika et al., 2024; Tika & Setiadi, 2026). Digital readiness is therefore part of the governance design of Village RPL, not an individual problem that can be left to participants.

Bojonegoro is a useful case because the regency did not merely endorse Village RPL. It committed substantial public resources and enrolled participants at scale. The 2022 cohort comprised 999 scholarship recipients, with 605 studying at Universitas Negeri Surabaya and 394 at Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta. Participants came from village government, village consultative bodies, village-owned enterprises, and professional facilitation. The regency allocated about Rp11.7 billion to support tuition and program implementation. The arrangement connected national policy, regional budgeting, university assessment, online learning, and workplace experience within one policy initiative. It therefore offers a concrete setting in which to examine both the possibilities and the tensions of intergovernmental collaboration.

Those tensions were visible from the beginning. Participants remained responsible for public services while attending lectures and completing assignments. Universities, meanwhile, were required to maintain the learning outcomes associated with Level 6 of the Indonesian Qualifications Framework. Online delivery reduced travel for regular classes, but it did not eliminate unstable connections, uneven digital skills, limited interaction, or last-minute schedule changes. Decision-making was concentrated among the ministry, the regency, and universities, whereas village institutions and participants had less influence over program design. The collaboration functioned, but it did not distribute authority or costs evenly. Nor could high enrolment, by itself, demonstrate better village services or welfare.

Recent reviews show that collaboration research spans intergovernmental networks, economic development, innovation, and service delivery, but the field remains fragmented by policy domain and level of analysis (Chen, 2022; Lopes & Farias, 2022). RPL scholarship, by contrast, is centered largely on recognition processes, assessment, access, and institutional practice (de Paor, 2024; Raciti et al., 2024). The earlier Bojonegoro study used a CIPP evaluation framework and focused on program context, inputs,

process, and product (Ma'ruf et al., 2024). That evaluation asked whether the program performed; it did not ask how authority, finance, and academic recognition are distributed across the levels of government that produce it. An earlier study of the same programme mapped the actors and relationships of the intergovernmental network at the point of initiation (Ma'ruf et al., 2023), but stopped short of the implementation stage at which those relationships are tested. International evidence points to the same unresolved issue. A study of local collaborative governance finds that its effect on public service delivery operates through institutional capacity building rather than through the collaborative arrangement in itself (Zia ud din et al., 2023), while a global review of local-level collaboration reports that decision-makers consistently struggle to share power with other actors even where collaborative structures are formally established (McNaught, 2024). Capacity and the distribution of authority thus emerge as the decisive variables, yet neither line of work examines a setting in which the capacity being built belongs to the public officials who are themselves parties to the collaboration. What remains underexplored is how the same initiative operates as an intergovernmental arrangement in which a national ministry sets direction, a regency carries major fiscal responsibility, universities control academic recognition, and village actors work within the consequences of those decisions. This article addresses that governance gap.

Three questions guide the analysis. How were authority, resources, and institutional roles arranged in Bojonegoro's Village RPL program? Which conditions helped or hindered implementation across government, universities, and participating villages? Finally, what type of collaboration model can keep participant capacity, rather than the network itself, at the center of the program? The article makes three contributions. It provides an empirical account of a large RPL initiative at the point where national policy, regional finance, and university authority meet; it traces the observed implementation problems to their institutional sources rather than to individual participant shortcomings; and it develops a Capacity-Centred Intergovernmental Collaboration model that reframes the criterion of collaborative success from network durability to demonstrated gains in village administrative capacity.

2. Methods

2.1. Research Design and Case Selection

A qualitative single-case study was used to examine the governance and implementation of Village RPL in Bojonegoro Regency. The case was bounded by the 2022 intake and the learning and evaluation activities that continued through 2024. Bojonegoro was selected purposively because it was the first regency to finance Village RPL on this scale through its regional budget. The analysis focused on relationships among the Ministry of Villages, the Bojonegoro Regency Government, Universitas Negeri Surabaya, and programme participants. The article uses a focused subset of the wider dissertation dataset so that the principal institutional positions and participant experience can be examined in depth.

2.2. Analytical Framework

The analytical framework was constructed around three linked questions: how authority was divided, how collaboration worked in practice, and what the arrangement enabled village officials to do. Evidence on central-local relations was used to examine function allocation, fiscal relationships, contact, and collaborative attitudes (Chung & Choi, 2022). Process-based accountability research informed the analysis of who could explain, monitor, and answer for decisions made within the collaboration (Lee & Ospina, 2022). Work on collaborative innovation directed attention to leadership, goals, participation, communication, and knowledge sharing (Lopes & Farias, 2022). Finally, Indonesian village studies provided an empirical basis for treating administrative competence and accountable financial management as capacity outcomes rather than assuming that collaboration itself constituted success (Indra & Khoirunurrofik, 2022; Cahyani et al., 2022). Taken together, these perspectives allowed the analysis to connect intergovernmental arrangements with participant-level and organisational consequences.

The framework distinguishes between institutional architecture, collaborative practice, and capacity outcomes. Institutional architecture includes mandates, agreements, budgets, role allocation, and academic authority. Collaborative practice concerns coordination, resource sharing, information

exchange, problem solving, and adaptation during implementation. Capacity outcomes refer to reported changes in knowledge, administrative skill, reflective judgement, digital competence, and service orientation. The framework also treats asymmetry as an empirical question. Cooperation may be formally agreed while costs, risks, or decision-making power remain concentrated in one organisation. Figure 1 and Table 1 summarise the dimensions used in the coding process.

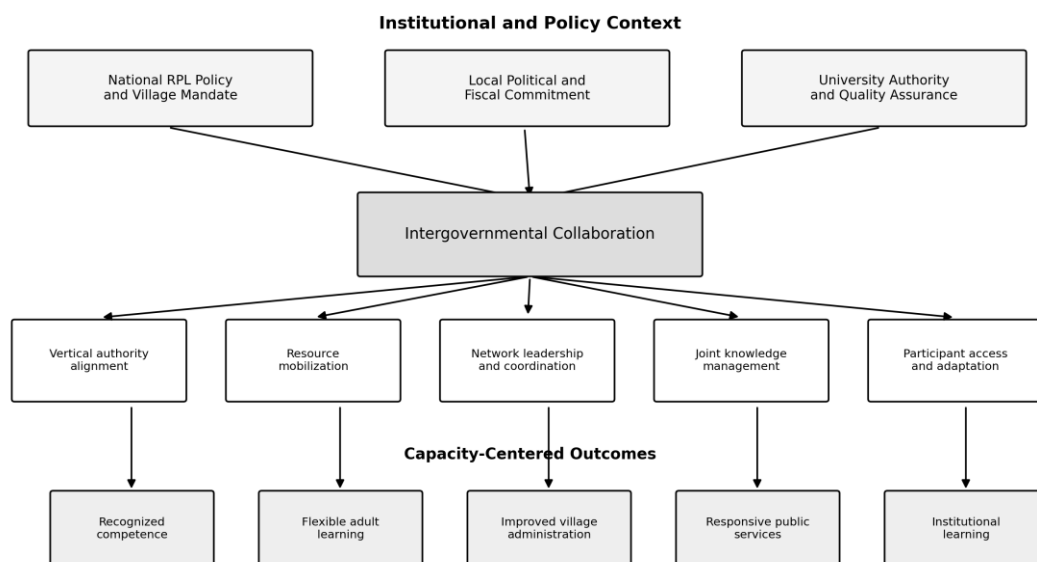


Figure 1. Analytical framework for examining capacity-centred collaboration in Village RPL. Source: Authors' analysis, 2026.

Table 1. Dimensions used to analyse Village RPL collaboration

Analytical dimension	Questions used in coding	Evidence examined
Alignment of authority	How national, regional, and academic mandates were connected	Regulations, agreements, interviews
Mobilisation of resources	How finance, staff, assessment expertise, platforms, and administrative support were provided	Budget records, interviews, observation
Leadership and coordination	Who convened actors, resolved problems, monitored progress, and communicated decisions	Interviews, meeting records
Management of knowledge	How guidance, portfolios, academic records, and evaluation information were shared	Documents, observation
Participant access	How schedules, connectivity, technology, travel, and mentoring affected participation	NGT, interviews, observation
Changes in capacity	What participants reported about administration, budgeting, judgement, and responsiveness	Interviews, evaluation records
Adaptation during implementation	How delivery, schedules, technical support, and review were adjusted	Interviews, NGT, documents
Inclusion in governance	Whether villages and participants influenced design and evaluation	Interviews, agreement analysis

Source: Authors' analytical framework, 2026.

2.3. Participants and Data Collection

Six interviews were selected from the dissertation dataset to represent the main actor positions: an official from the Human Resources Development Agency of the Ministry of Villages, the Regent of Bojonegoro, the head of the regency's Community and Village Empowerment Agency, the Director of RPL at Universitas Negeri Surabaya, an RPL lecturer, and a scholarship recipient who worked in village government. A separate Nominal Group Technique involved 22 participants from 11 subdistricts, with two representatives from each subdistrict. That group included village heads, village officials, managers of village-owned enterprises, and professional village facilitators. In total, the article draws directly on

evidence from 28 people. Table 2 summarises the participants and the sources of evidence used in the analysis.

The interviews covered policy origins, division of authority, financing, assessment, teaching, digital constraints, reported changes in competence, and adjustments made during implementation. Observation followed the 16-meeting learning cycle at Universitas Negeri Surabaya, including synchronous classes, asynchronous activities, project assignments, examinations, and communication through the university LMS, Google Meet, WhatsApp, and Google Classroom. Documents included national RPL rules, programme guidelines, memoranda of understanding, scholarship records, academic guidance, monitoring files, and evaluation materials. Interview quotations were translated from Indonesian and identified by role-based codes. Comparing these sources made it possible to test official accounts against participant experience and programme records.

Table 2. Participants and sources of evidence used in the article

Code or group	Number	Programme position	Main evidence
CG-01, ministry official	1	National policy initiation and facilitation	Interview, policy documents
LG-01, Regent	1	Political leadership and support for the learning environment	Interview, programme records
LG-02, DPMPD head	1	Financing, recruitment, and regional coordination	Interview, budget records
HE-01, RPL director	1	Recognition assessment, credit conversion, and quality assurance	Interview, academic guidance
HE-02, lecturer	1	Teaching and the connection between experience and academic knowledge	Interview, observation
VP-01, participant	1	Learning experience and application in village work	Interview, observation
NGT participants	22	Collective identification and ranking of implementation problems	Nominal Group Technique
Total	28	Institutional and participant perspectives across levels	Integrated qualitative evidence

Source: Dissertation dataset, selected and organised for this article.

2.4. Nominal Group Technique and Priority Index

The Nominal Group Technique was used to establish which implementation problems participants considered most pressing. Members first wrote down problems individually. The responses were then reported in turn, clarified, grouped, and discussed before participants agreed on a final ranking. This staged procedure is consistent with methodological guidance that uses structured idea generation, clarification, and ranking to balance participation within a group (McMillan et al., 2016). Five issues remained after consolidation: clashes between lecture and village-office schedules, limited digital competence, travel to campus for examinations, sudden changes to lecture schedules, and difficulty understanding academic material.

The dissertation retained the final ranking but not each participant's raw voting score. To avoid presenting reconstructed votes as original data, the article converts rank into a Normalised Priority Index: $NPI = ((6 - r) / 5) \times 100$, where r is the final rank. The index is used only to display the distance between ranks on a common scale. It is not a percentage of votes. The ranked problems were then examined with a 5 Why exercise to identify the organisational conditions behind them. Table 3 reports the resulting ranking and the corresponding index values.

Table 3. Participant ranking of the main implementation problems

Rank	Problem identified by participants	Normalised Priority Index
1	Lectures overlapped with village-office responsibilities	100
2	Participants had uneven digital competence	80
3	Campus examinations required long-distance travel	60

Rank	Problem identified by participants	Normalised Priority Index
4	Lecture schedules changed at short notice	40
5	Some academic material was difficult to understand	20

Source: Final NGT ranking reported in the dissertation; index calculated by the authors.

2.5. Data Analysis, Trustworthiness, and Research Ethics

Data analysis proceeded in two stages. First, material was coded against the dimensions in Table 1, including authority alignment, resource mobilisation, network leadership, knowledge management, access, capacity change, adaptation, and inclusion. Second, open coding was used for issues that did not fit neatly within those categories, such as unstable connectivity, workload, academic language, motivation, and unequal financing. Themes were developed by comparing accounts across actors and checking them against documents, observation notes, and NGT results. Reflexive thematic analysis guidance informed this interpretive step, so themes were treated as reasoned constructions from the data rather than as automatic products of coding (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Credibility was strengthened through source and method triangulation, attention to contradictory accounts, and an audit trail linking interpretations to evidence. Institutional actors often stressed the programme's scale and strategic value, while participants more readily discussed schedule pressure, digital problems, and limited flexibility. Both positions were retained. Vensim PLE was used to draw qualitative relationships among the themes, not to run a numerical system-dynamics simulation. The research involved adult participants in a low-risk policy setting. Participation was voluntary, consent was obtained before interviews and group discussion, and names were omitted from the article.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Programme Architecture and Access Expansion

Village RPL translated work experience into a sequence that universities could assess. Participants registered, prepared portfolios, submitted evidence, underwent recognition assessment, received credit for demonstrated learning, and completed the courses or projects still required for the degree. The arrangement did more than shorten study. It created a formal conversation between the practical knowledge held by village actors and the learning outcomes used in higher education. Figure 2 shows the main stages and the support needed across the process.

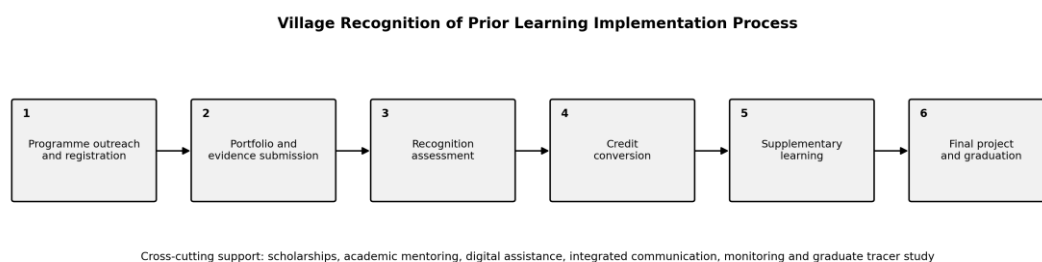


Figure 2. Main stages of the Village Recognition of Prior Learning programme. Source: Adapted from programme guidance and dissertation findings, 2026.

Programme records list 999 scholarship recipients: 605 at Universitas Negeri Surabaya and 394 at Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta. Bojonegoro Regency allocated approximately Rp11.7 billion from its regional budget for tuition and implementation. At Universitas Negeri Surabaya, most participants were village officials, although the cohort also included village heads, members of village consultative bodies, managers of village-owned enterprises, and professional facilitators. Table 4 presents the composition. The numbers show a strong political and fiscal commitment, but they should be read as evidence of reach, not as proof that village performance improved.

Learning at Universitas Negeri Surabaya combined live online classes with asynchronous study. Google Meet was used heavily during the first seven sessions, while the university LMS, WhatsApp, and

Google Classroom supported later communication and assignment submission. Courses generally followed a 16-session cycle, with mid-semester and final assessments. Project work was intended to connect academic concepts with actual village problems. The arrangement gave working adults access to university study, but it also demanded self-management and digital confidence. Five students were formally reviewed because of prolonged inactivity, incomplete work, resignation, prior degree status, or missing institutional permission. These cases were few, yet they showed why readiness screening and early support matter.

Participants commonly described the programme as a bridge between experience and formal knowledge. They reported greater confidence in administrative services, village budgeting, organisational coordination, and responding to public complaints. Those accounts are summarised in Table 5. The programme's political meaning was also important. The Regent framed the scholarship as an investment in village development, not simply a benefit for individual officials.

“The Village RPL programme is an investment that should not be missed. It is an investment in village development and in stronger capacity at village level.” (LG-01, Regent of Bojonegoro; translated by the authors)

That message gave public legitimacy to study time and encouraged officials who were uncertain about returning to education. It also linked personal qualification with a broader expectation of better village government. Even so, the evidence warrants a measured interpretation. Participants and lecturers reported changes in confidence and practice, but the research did not include a control group, baseline competency test, or long-term service indicators. Indonesian studies show why both administrative capacity and village services matter for development outcomes (Indra & Khoirunurrofik, 2022; Gaspersz, 2023), but the present design cannot attribute changes in welfare or service performance to RPL alone.

Table 4. Universitas Negeri Surabaya participants by village role

Participant role	Number	Share (%)
Village heads	34	5.6
Village officials	443	73.2
Village Consultative Body members	32	5.3
BUMDes or BUMDesma managers	81	13.4
Professional village facilitators	15	2.5
Total	605	100.0

Source: Bojonegoro Community and Village Empowerment Agency, 2022.

Table 5. Competency changes reported after participation in Village RPL

Area of competence	Change described by participants	Caution in interpretation
Administration and public services	More orderly document handling and greater attention to procedural consistency	Service times were not independently measured
Village budgeting	More systematic preparation and reporting of the village budget	Audit outcomes were outside the study
Organisational governance	Clearer task division and stronger coordination among officials	Differences among villages were not quantified
Planning and decision-making	Greater confidence in defining problems and considering policy alternatives	Based on participant and lecturer accounts
Professional confidence	Less dependence on external assistance for routine planning and budgeting	Long-term continuation requires tracer evidence

Source: Interviews, NGT discussion, and dissertation evaluation records.

3.2. Vertical Authority Alignment and Resource Mobilization

Village RPL depended on the alignment of several legal and institutional authorities. Village policy created the demand for stronger officials; higher-education rules defined how prior learning could be recognised; the national qualifications framework set the expected bachelor-level outcomes; and regional budget authority made the scholarships possible. The Ministry of Villages promoted the initiative, worked

with the Universities for Villages network, formed an ad hoc team, and took part in assessment and evaluation. A ministry official described the intended division of labour in pragmatic terms.

“The ministry provided the broad policy umbrella through regulation and the memorandum of understanding. Our role was national facilitation. Detailed implementation was left to regional autonomy so that each district could adjust it to its fiscal capacity.”
(CG-01, BPSDM Ministry of Villages; translated by the authors)

This flexibility gave Bojonegoro room to innovate, but it also left the regency to solve many operational questions. Local officials had to connect national policy with regional regulations, scholarship administration, budgeting, participant selection, and day-to-day coordination. In other words, the national framework opened the door, but the local bureaucracy built much of the mechanism behind it.

“The broad rules were already there, but the technical arrangement for collaboration was not detailed. At the beginning, the regency had to work out how national policy could be aligned with local regulation so that the scholarship could legally be financed from the regional budget.”
(LG-02, Head of Bojonegoro DPMPD; translated by the authors)

The case illustrates both the opportunity and the risk of decentralised implementation. Central government retained policy influence, while the regency carried much of the operational responsibility. Bojonegoro could manage that burden because it had political commitment, administrative initiative, and fiscal space. Another district might not. Research on central-local collaboration indicates that functional allocation, fiscal relationships, and the quality of intergovernmental interaction shape collaborative relationships (Chung & Choi, 2022). Bojonegoro's experience suggests that formal alignment can coexist with operational dependence on the local level: the national framework enabled the programme, but regional actors still had to make it workable.

Financing made the imbalance clearer. The programme was nationally promoted, but the scholarship cost was borne by Bojonegoro's regional budget. There was no equivalent national cost-sharing commitment. For local officials, this raised a practical question about whether the model could travel beyond a relatively well-supported case.

“The programme was promoted as a ministry priority, but Bojonegoro financed the scholarships. Cost sharing or a national contribution would be important for districts with less fiscal space. Otherwise, replication will depend too much on local capacity.”
(LG-02, Head of Bojonegoro DPMPD; translated by the authors)

Bojonegoro's Rp11.7 billion commitment made the programme possible at scale, yet the same arrangement could make future implementation vulnerable to budget pressure or a change in political priorities. Collaboration research highlights complementary resources and active orchestration (Pratistha et al., 2026), while central-local evidence shows that fiscal relationships can materially influence the quality of collaboration (Chung & Choi, 2022). The Bojonegoro experience adds a financing lesson: orchestration should specify who pays for what and how the arrangement will survive beyond one budget cycle.

The resources exchanged were not limited to money. The ministry supplied legitimacy and national coordination. Universities contributed assessors, lecturers, academic systems, and qualification authority. The regency recruited participants and provided administrative support. Village offices absorbed the time costs of staff who were studying, while participants brought the experiential knowledge that made recognition possible. These contributions were complementary, but not all were visible in formal programme design. Time, connectivity, workplace cover, and family support were often treated as personal matters even though they directly affected implementation.

3.3. University Authority, Knowledge Transformation, and Adult Learning

Universitas Negeri Surabaya held a pivotal role because it decided what prior learning could be recognised and what additional learning was required. That authority brought a genuine tension. The university was expected to widen access for experienced officials, but it also had to protect the academic meaning of a bachelor's degree. The Director of RPL was explicit about that boundary.

“We understand that village officials have demanding workloads. Even so, the university remains responsible for higher-education quality and Level 6 of the Indonesian Qualifications Framework. Portfolios must be valid, and the required academic work still has to be completed.” (HE-01, Director of RPL, Universitas Negeri Surabaya; translated by the authors)

Quality assurance is essential because weak assessment would damage the credibility of the qualification and the programme. At the same time, the dissertation identified concern that portfolio assessment could become too dependent on documents. A more credible approach would combine documentary evidence with structured interviews, work products, demonstrations, and reflection on how decisions were made. This would test competence rather than the ability to assemble paperwork.

The classroom also brought together two forms of knowledge. Participants understood the practical realities of budgeting, conflict, public services, and village politics. Lecturers offered conceptual language, analytical tools, regulatory interpretation, and research methods. Contemporary RPL research treats assessment as a pedagogical process, not simply a decision about credit. Experiential learning must be elicited in ways that fit its contextual character (de Paor, 2024), and the translation of workplace knowledge into academic evidence requires specialised mediation between different forms of knowledge (Pokorny, 2024). In Bojonegoro, recognition was valuable not only because it acknowledged what officials already knew, but because it created a setting in which established routines could be examined against academic concepts.

Study was nevertheless difficult to fit around public duties. A participating official described the early months as a constant negotiation between residents' needs and university deadlines.

“At first we felt overwhelmed. During office hours we still had to serve residents, manage social assistance, and finish village administration. University assignments came at the same time, so sometimes the work was completed in a hurry simply to meet the deadline.” (VP-01, Village RPL participant; translated by the authors)

The difficulty was not simply a matter of individual discipline. University timetables and village-service timetables were both relatively inflexible, leaving adult learners to negotiate two sets of obligations. A better response would keep the learning outcomes unchanged but alter the route used to reach them. Evidence on working learners shows that prior-learning mechanisms are most useful when they reduce unnecessary repetition and create feasible pathways through formal study (Klein-Collins & Shafenberg, 2023). RPL review evidence likewise identifies guidance and consistent institutional procedures as conditions that shape participation (Raciti et al., 2024). Predictable calendars, block or weekend sessions, recorded lectures, asynchronous materials, case-based assignments, and peer mentoring would therefore improve accessibility without lowering academic standards.

Participants should also have a stronger voice in programme design. Experimental evidence indicates that representation can strengthen the perceived legitimacy of collaborative governance (Lee & Esteve, 2023), while comparative research shows that collaborative arrangements need explicit mechanisms to reconcile legitimacy with accountability (Cristofoli et al., 2022). For Village RPL, this means involving village officials and village institutions in decisions about schedules, support, assessment communication, and evaluation. Such involvement need not weaken university authority. It can make the application of academic standards more responsive to the realities of working adults.

3.4. Implementation Barriers and Adaptive Responses

The NGT produced a clear order of implementation problems, but the issues were closely connected. The first-ranked problem was the clash between lectures and village-office responsibilities. Digital competence was second. Travel to campus for examinations ranked third, followed by sudden changes in lecture schedules and difficulty understanding academic material. A participant could experience several of these problems at once: a timetable change might require an online class at short notice, during village-office hours, on an unstable connection, using an unfamiliar platform. The ranking is therefore best read as a map of pressure points rather than five isolated complaints.

Digital participation depended on devices, skills, confidence, connection quality, and access to assistance. One participant stressed that absence was not always a sign of weak commitment.

“I tried to attend every class, but heavy rain often made the connection at the village office and at home unstable. On several occasions I could not enter the meeting at all, even though I was ready to join.” (NGT participant, village official; translated by the authors)

This experience reflects a layered digital-access problem. Digital readiness varies in skills and institutional support even where nominal access exists (van de Werfhorst et al., 2022). Online-learning research further shows that learners rely on help-seeking, time management, and technical adaptation when barriers emerge (Barrot et al., 2021). In Indonesian village programmes, training, confidence, and an enabling institutional environment also shape the value gained from digital tools (Jatnika et al., 2024). A one-off technical orientation at the beginning of the semester would therefore be insufficient for some participants. Digital readiness should be assessed early, and support should remain available through a helpdesk, practice activities, mobile-friendly materials, and local peer mentors.

Communication problems were amplified by the number of platforms in use. The LMS, WhatsApp, Google Classroom, lecturer messages, and local-government channels all served a purpose, but they did not always carry the same information at the same time. Reviews of collaborative digital transformation emphasise that shared platforms do not remove governance problems; coordination and information practices remain central (Maulana & Dečman, 2023). JISDeP evidence likewise points to the need to integrate digital systems, training, and stakeholder coordination (Tika & Setiadi, 2026). For Village RPL, one authoritative calendar and a clear notification protocol would reduce uncertainty without requiring new technology.

Hybrid delivery also failed to remove every geographical burden. Campus-based examinations required travel, time, and expense. Regional assessment centres or secure supervised online examinations could reduce that burden while maintaining integrity. Difficulty with academic material had a different source. Some participants were unfamiliar with academic language or one-way online teaching. Bridging sessions, examples drawn from village cases, peer study groups, and lecturer development in adult education would address the problem more directly than lowering course content. Table 6 brings these barriers, their causes, and possible responses together.

Table 6. Implementation barriers, underlying causes, and practical responses

Barrier	Underlying institutional condition	Practical effect	Response proposed
Schedule conflict	The academic calendar was not routinely aligned with village-service obligations	Absence, rushed assignments, and pressure on office services	Publish a fixed calendar, use block sessions, provide asynchronous content, and allow realistic submission windows
Uneven digital competence	Participants differed in device use, platform experience, and familiarity with online academic procedures	Lower participation and reliance on informal help	Assess readiness, provide orientation and a helpdesk, and appoint local peer mentors
Unstable connectivity	Village networks varied in quality and were sensitive to weather	Interrupted classes and delayed submissions	Provide recordings, downloadable materials, and flexible attendance verification
Distance to campus	Examinations and some academic services remained centralised	Travel cost, time loss, and reduced access	Use regional assessment centres or secure supervised online examinations
Late schedule changes	Communication was dispersed across lecturers, programme managers, platforms, and local officials	Uncertainty and difficulty arranging village duties	Use one authoritative calendar and an agreed notification protocol
Difficulty with academic material	Academic language and teaching methods were not always adapted to adult learners	Surface learning and reduced confidence	Offer bridging sessions, village-based cases, mentoring, and lecturer preparation in adult education

Source: NGT ranking, 5 Why analysis, interviews, and observation.

3.5. Capacity-Centred Intergovernmental Collaboration Model

The empirical pattern suggests that collaboration should be judged by what it builds in village officials, not only by the durability of the institutional network. The Capacity-Centred Intergovernmental Collaboration model, abbreviated as CC-IGC, places participant capacity at the point where policy, finance,

academic authority, and learning support meet. It is not a replacement for intergovernmental structures. Rather, it gives those structures a clearer purpose. Its distinguishing feature is the criterion of success it imposes: where established collaboration frameworks judge an arrangement by the stability of the network and the completion of agreed outputs, CC-IGC judges it by whether recognition is credible, learning is applied at work, and village administration demonstrably improves. Figure 3 presents the model derived from the study.

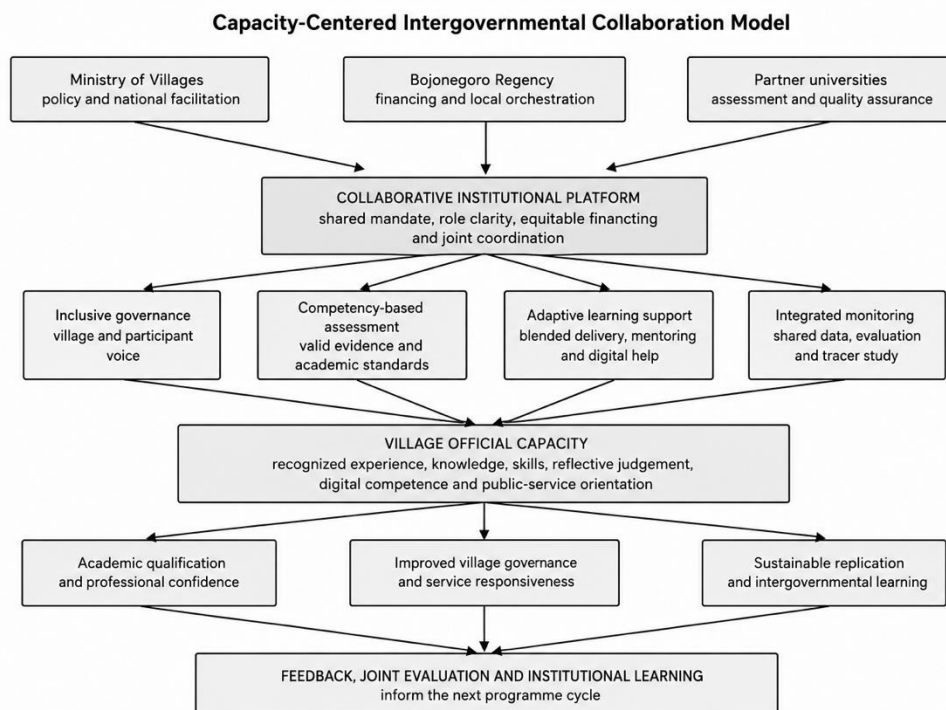


Figure 3. Capacity-Centred Intergovernmental Collaboration model for Village RPL. Source: Authors' synthesis of dissertation findings, 2026.

The model begins with an institutional platform. National policy gives the program direction, local regulation and budgeting enable implementation, and universities protect assessment and degree standards. These functions should be stated in a shared operating arrangement rather than left to informal negotiation. Financing also needs to be more balanced. A national program that relies entirely on regional scholarships will be difficult to reproduce in places with limited fiscal space.

The next element is the implementation pathway. Recruitment should consider motivation, permission from the participant's institution, digital readiness, the fit between prior experience and the chosen study program, and the support available at work. Assessment should test competence beyond a portfolio checklist. Additional courses should connect theory to village problems, and final projects should produce something usable in administration or community development. In this way, RPL becomes a route for professional learning rather than merely a reduction in study credits.

Adaptive support surrounds that pathway. Working adults need reliable schedules, blended delivery, academic bridging, technical help, regional learning support, and peer mentoring. Flexibility does not mean that the qualification is easier. It means participants have feasible ways to demonstrate the same learning outcomes. This distinction is important for maintaining both inclusion and academic trust.

The model also includes shared monitoring and feedback. Recruitment data, recognition decisions, course progress, support requests, graduation, and tracer-study results should be connected across institutions. Village representatives and participants should take part in regular review. Collaborative innovation research treats learning, communication, and information sharing as governance mechanisms rather than ancillary activities (Lopes & Farias, 2022). Research on collaborative governance in the digital-transformation context likewise shows that collaborative arrangements must adapt as information

practices and technologies change (Maulana & Dečman, 2023). The feedback loop in CC-IGC gives that adaptive requirement an operational form.

The final test is performance that can be connected to public value. Agreements, expenditure, enrolment, and graduation are necessary program indicators, but they are not enough. Empirical research on collaborative service networks shows that network composition can be associated with different dimensions of performance, so activity levels alone are an incomplete proxy for outcomes (Kim & Sullivan, 2023). The collaboration should therefore show that competence was recognized credibly, new knowledge was acquired, learning was applied at work, and village organizations became more capable of serving residents. CC-IGC proposes that collaboration contributes to sustainable village governance when institutional arrangements are organized around learning, application, and evidence of improvement.

3.6. Policy Implications for Sustainable Village Development

Village RPL would be stronger if it were treated as a continuing capacity policy rather than a one-off scholarship program. Recognition of experience is useful, but its public value depends on what participants do with the qualification and the learning that accompanies it. Evaluation should therefore follow graduates into the workplace. Relevant indicators include the quality of village planning and budgeting, administrative innovation, service responsiveness, career development, and the use of evidence in decision-making.

A permanent steering forum could provide the institutional home for that work. Membership should include the Ministry of Villages, local governments, universities, village-government representatives, and participant representatives. The forum would maintain a common participant database, agree on the academic calendar, set communication and support standards, review complaints, and examine outcomes. It should also establish a national-regional cost-sharing formula. Without such a mechanism, expansion will continue to depend on the fiscal strength and political preference of individual regencies.

Universities have a particular responsibility to combine rigor with accessibility. Recognition assessment should be competency-based, and participants should receive academic orientation before full coursework begins. Research on working learners supports structures that connect prior learning with flexible routes through formal study (Klein-Collins & Shafenberg, 2023), while online-learning evidence supports continued technical and learning assistance rather than assuming that access to a platform is enough (Barrot et al., 2021). JISDeP findings further indicate that training, coordination, usable information, and institutional support determine whether digital arrangements create value (Jatnika et al., 2024; Tika & Setiadi, 2026). Case-based teaching, block sessions, asynchronous materials, mentoring, and technical assistance can therefore help working adults meet degree standards without reducing them.

Graduate tracer studies should begin within six months and continue at least through the first year after graduation. They should look for changes in planning, budgeting, administrative practice, innovation, service delivery, and citizen experience. Comparative designs would help separate program effects from changes caused by leadership, staffing, regulation, or local development conditions. Evidence of this kind is needed before Village RPL can credibly be described as improving welfare or service quality.

The program is relevant to several sustainable-development concerns: adult access to education, stronger local institutions, digital capability, and partnership between government and higher education. Yet a national model should not be a literal copy of Bojonegoro. The more transferable elements are the principles identified in CC-IGC: credible recognition, equitable financing, participant voice, adaptive support, and outcome-based evaluation.

Conclusion

The Bojonegoro case shows that an intergovernmental arrangement can open university access to experienced village actors on a scale that one institution could not deliver alone. National policy provided legitimacy, the regency supplied financing and local coordination, universities assessed learning and awarded qualifications, and participants contributed the professional experience on which recognition depended. Through that combination, 999 people entered a formal higher-education pathway.

The same case also shows the limits of formal cooperation. Financial responsibility rested mainly with the regency, academic control rested with universities, and village institutions and participants had relatively little influence over program design. Those imbalances were reflected in timetable clashes, digital problems, inconsistent communication, travel burdens, and teaching arrangements that did not always fit working adults. Agreements and scholarships were indispensable, but they did not resolve the practical work of collaboration.

The proposed Capacity-Centred Intergovernmental Collaboration model responds to those weaknesses by placing learning and workplace application at the centre of the institutional arrangement. It links clear roles and financing with credible assessment, adaptive learning support, shared monitoring, participant involvement, and a feedback cycle. The policy implication is straightforward: Village RPL should be managed as a long-term capacity system, not as a temporary education project.

The article contributes to collaborative-governance research by showing how intergovernmental relations interact with adult education, public-service workloads, and qualification authority. It also extends RPL research beyond assessment and access by showing how financing, local administration, digital infrastructure, and cross-level coordination shape the quality of recognition. Further studies should compare regencies with different fiscal and geographic conditions and follow graduates long enough to test whether CC-IGC is associated with measurable changes in village practice.

Limitations

The study has four limitations. It examines one regency and concentrates on Universitas Negeri Surabaya as the principal university case, so the conclusions are analytically rather than statistically generalizable. It also uses six interviews selected from a larger dissertation dataset, alongside 22 NGT participants; this captures the main actor positions but not every organizational variation. The original NGT material preserved the final order of priorities but not individual vote totals, which is why the Normalized Priority Index is a rank conversion rather than an observed percentage. Finally, most outcome evidence concerns participant experience and reported changes in competence. The research did not measure long-term effects on audits, service times, citizen satisfaction, or village welfare. Multi-site studies, pre- and post-program assessment, and graduate tracer data are needed to address these limits.

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Declaration of Generative AI Use

During preparation of this manuscript, the authors used OpenAI ChatGPT in a limited supporting role for language-related tasks, including improving grammar, readability, sentence flow, and the clarity of selected passages. The tool was also used to assist with minor restructuring of text where this helped present the authors' arguments more clearly.

Generative AI was not used to create or alter the research data, generate interview evidence, determine the analytical findings, replace the authors' interpretation of the results, or make decisions about the study's conclusions. The authors independently checked the factual content, citations, references, tables, figures, and interpretations included in the final manuscript. The authors reviewed and revised any AI-assisted wording before submission.

The authors remain fully responsible for the accuracy, integrity, originality, and scholarly content of the article, including all claims, interpretations, citations, and conclusions. The use of generative AI was therefore limited to editorial assistance and did not replace human authorship, academic judgment, or accountability.

Author Contributions

The authors' contributions were organized in accordance with the CRediT (Contributor Roles Taxonomy). The first author led the conceptualization, methodology, investigation, project administration, and supervision of the study, and prepared the original draft. Building on that groundwork, the second author contributed to the conceptualization and methodology and carried out the formal analysis and visualization, while the third author was responsible for data curation, validation, and formal analysis; both subsequently contributed to the review and editing of the manuscript. The fourth author further strengthened the work through validation and the interpretation of findings, and likewise contributed to the review and editing. Taken together, these complementary roles mean that all authors contributed to the development of the manuscript, reviewed and approved the final version for submission, and agree to be accountable for the integrity of the work.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no known financial or non-financial competing interests that could have influenced the research, analysis, interpretation, or presentation of the findings reported in this article, and that there are no personal, professional, institutional, or commercial relationships that could reasonably be perceived as creating a conflict of interest in relation to this manuscript. All authors have reviewed this declaration and confirm that no conflict of interest exists in connection with the submitted work.

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