

Nonformal Literacy and Bounded Social Transformation: A Historical Study of Kejar Paket A in Indonesia, 1977–1999

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Abstract

Background – Introduced in 1977, Kejar Paket A provided nonformal literacy for Indonesians who had never entered or completed primary school. This early function is often conflated with the elementary-equivalency pathway developed later.

Research Urgency – Existing accounts emphasize policy milestones and aggregate successes while giving insufficient attention to curricular change, delivery mechanisms, documentary bias, and the evidentiary limits of transformation claims.

Research Objectives – This study reconstructs Kejar Paket A between 1977 and 1999 and evaluates how its curriculum, learning arrangements, and management mechanisms contributed to literacy, livelihood capability, participation, agency, and educational access.

Research Method – Qualitative historical research examined six purposively selected Gita Setra issues published in 1981, 1983, 1986, 1987, 1993, and 1999. Regulations and a contemporary UNESCO study provided corroboration; recent indexed scholarship supported comparison. External and internal criticism assessed provenance, credibility, institutional framing, consistency, and corroboration. Evidence was coded diachronically and thematically and interpreted through contribution analysis.

Research Findings – The program developed through foundational literacy, functional consolidation, policy integration, and equivalency-oriented transition. A1–A100 materials combined literacy and numeracy with practical themes, group learning, tutoring, self-study, and low-cost media. Evidence is strongest for access and literacy capability; broader effects cannot be isolated from concurrent change.

Research Conclusion – Kejar Paket A provided a flexible bridge among literacy, community learning, and basic education, but its contribution should be expressed as bounded and context-dependent rather than as a singular cause of macro-social change.

Research Novelty – The study distinguishes early literacy from later equivalency and integrates source criticism, multidimensional transformation, and explicit evidentiary confidence in one historical account.

Keywords: adult literacy; historical research; Kejar Paket A; nonformal education; social transformation

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INTRODUCTION

Nonformal education is a central component of lifelong learning rather than a residual service for people who do not fit conventional schooling. It can complement formal education, respond to situated needs, and create alternative routes to knowledge, skills, and recognized progression. Classic distinctions among formal, nonformal, and informal learning emphasize organization, intention, setting, and certification, while more recent scholarship frames literacy as a lifelong process that changes with social, economic, and technological conditions (La Belle, 1982; Eshach, 2007; Hoppers, 2006; Rogers, 2005; Hanemann, 2025; Hanemann & Robinson, 2022). This broader view is important because the flexibility of nonformal provision can reduce barriers of age, work, distance, and prior school failure, but it can also reproduce institutional priorities when curriculum, assessment, and administration become overly centralized. Critical adult-education theory consequently asks not only whether learning is available, but also whose knowledge is recognized, which capabilities are expanded, and how power shapes participation (Gouthro, 2022).

Adult literacy illustrates these tensions. Literacy includes decoding, writing, and numeracy, but it is also practiced through relationships, routines, institutions, and material conditions. Adults learn at different rhythms and may judge a program by whether it respects their experience and helps them act in family, work, or community settings (Grummell, 2023; Demirbilek & Keser, 2023). Learner narratives show that literacy education may strengthen confidence, communication, and aspirations, yet a certificate or short course does not automatically generate durable income or social mobility (Klauth & Garza Mitchell, 2023; Simac et al., 2021). Freire's account of literacy stresses critical reflection and agency, while the capability perspective understands education as an expansion of substantive freedoms rather than as a single economic input (Freire, 2000; Sen, 1999). Accordingly, this study uses social transformation to mean documented or plausibly supported change in five domains: literacy and cognitive capability, livelihood-related capability, social participation, attitudes and agency, and educational access and equity.

Participation in adult and nonformal education is socially patterned. Recent comparative evidence associates participation with prior education, basic skills, age, gender, race or ethnicity, employment, perceived relevance, and institutional opportunity (Kalenda et al., 2026; Yamashita et al., 2022; Punksungka et al., 2022; Karmaeva & Kosyakova, 2022). Perceptions of learning, course timing, and duration also influence entry and persistence, while predictive studies show that no single demographic characteristic explains participation adequately (Heuer et al., 2025; Rüter & Martin, 2022; Jang et al., 2023). Longitudinal patterns indicate that nonparticipation in midlife can accumulate from earlier disadvantages (Jenkins, 2021). These findings challenge policies that assign responsibility solely to individuals: meritocratic lifelong-learning narratives may obscure structural exclusion (Regmi, 2023), and multidimensional participation frameworks are needed to recognize attendance, voice, belonging, and influence rather than enrollment alone (Karger et al., 2025).

Second-chance education is therefore more than a substitute school. It provides a route back into learning for people whose earlier educational trajectories were interrupted, but participants may encounter stigma, institutional demands, and age- or class-related risks of dropout (Raoufi-Kvist, 2025; Schuchart & Schimke, 2022; Schuchart & Bühler-Niederberger, 2020). Studies across European and post-conflict settings show that second-chance programs may restore educational identity, improve employment prospects, or meet urgent aspirations, although effects depend on program design and surrounding labor and welfare institutions (Vandenabeele, 2024; Kiprianos & Mpourgos, 2022; Kelly et al., 2022; Taka, 2023). Learners cannot be treated as a homogeneous remedial category: systems construct different images of adulthood, motivation, and responsibility (Vanderavero et al., 2026), and learning environments may serve both qualification and social-support functions (Van Den Berghe et al., 2024). Life trajectories and expected change shape participation (Papadimitriou, 2024), while interconnected classroom literacy practices show why practical relevance and cultural recognition matter (Walldén, 2020).

Community learning institutions are a principal infrastructure for such provision. Research on community learning centres identifies benefits in proximity, local participation, university–community

engagement, and links among education, development, and public services (Agyekum et al., 2024; Neak & Charungkaittikul, 2023; Aryeh-Adjei, 2026; Belete et al., 2022). At the same time, inadequate resources, weak coordination, limited program diversity, and uneven educator capacity can constrain continuity (Akintolu et al., 2022; Mukeredzi, 2022). Adult education can contribute to community development when learning is embedded in collective priorities rather than delivered as an isolated technical intervention (Biney, 2025). Constructivist practice likewise depends on whether adult learners can connect new knowledge with existing experience and participate actively in meaning-making (Mayombe, 2020). These insights are directly relevant to Kejar Paket A because its study-group design attempted to extend national materials through local tutors and community settings.

Transformation through nonformal learning can occur beyond certification. Community-based participatory research and transformative learning can connect basic education with collective inquiry (Kastner & Motschilnig, 2022), while environmental, arts-based, and critical-information-learning initiatives illustrate pathways from knowledge to belonging, action, and public voice (Griswold et al., 2024; Irving, 2020; Cairns, 2025). However, recognition and exclusion remain central, as shown by adult-learning experiences among asylum seekers (Oshodi, 2023). Digital courses may expand opportunities for marginalized communities when access, pedagogy, and support are deliberately designed (Yüksel-Arslan et al., 2025), and participatory adult education can cultivate hope and democratic engagement (Griswold, 2023; Haren Conely & Cordie, 2023). Collective learning in social movements further demonstrates that nonformal education may build capacity for public action (Ollis, 2021). Yet civic participation is associated with multiple personal and institutional factors, so adult education should be treated as one contributor rather than an automatic cause (Klinkhammer et al., 2024).

Policy design determines whether these possibilities become accessible. Literacy campaigns in Canada, Tanzania, Brazil, Pakistan, and other settings show recurrent tensions among political commitment, continuity, financing, learner recruitment, local adaptation, and monitoring (Elfert & Walker, 2020; Fute et al., 2023; Malloes & dos Santos Costa, 2025; Noreen & Iqbal, 2025). The Sustainable Development Goals have renewed attention to adult literacy, but cross-national analysis suggests that ambitious targets remain difficult to reach without stable systems for adult learning (Grotlüschen et al., 2025). Monitoring arrangements must connect global indicators with national and local evidence (Stepanek Lockhart, 2022). Digital transformation adds both opportunity and risk: vulnerable adults require supported digital-literacy provision, organizational readiness, and accessible learning materials (Alamprese, 2024; Bonnes, 2024; McGinty, 2021). These contemporary studies provide comparative concepts for analyzing historical implementation, not a basis for projecting present conditions backward onto Indonesia in the 1970s and 1980s.

Evidence on outcomes likewise requires restraint. Participation barriers identified by adult-literacy practitioners include time, confidence, household responsibilities, cost, location, and program relevance (Noreen & Iqbal, 2024). Quasi-experimental evidence can detect literacy-skill development where comparison and measurement are available (Amine et al., 2025), while integrated functional adult education may contribute to livelihood practices when instruction connects with productive activity (Oljira & Hailu, 2021). Large-scale studies also associate literacy and language provision with socio-political participation, but the relationship is neither uniform nor reducible to course attendance (Grotlüschen et al., 2021). Historical research adds another caution: literacy programs are embedded in ideology and politics, and official narratives must be read in relation to the institutions that produced them (Kim & Kang, 2021). The present study therefore distinguishes direct evidence, plausible contribution, and unsupported attribution.

Indonesia entered the 1970s with a substantial literacy challenge. A contemporary national study reported that the 1971 census identified 21,681,591 people aged 10–44 as illiterate, including 14,428,395 women and 7,253,196 men, as well as 1,360,576 early primary-school dropouts (UNESCO Principal Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, 1991). These figures reflected uneven access to schooling, rural disadvantage, poverty, and the limited capacity of formal education to recover those who had never enrolled or had left early.

In 1977, the Directorate of Community Education introduced Kejar Paket A for people who had not attended or completed primary school. The early program used A1–A100 materials that combined reading, writing, numeracy, Indonesian-language use, and functional knowledge. This origin must be distinguished from the later meaning of Paket A as an elementary-equivalency pathway. The regulatory environment included a 1977 ministerial decision, the 1989 National Education System Law, and the 1991 regulation on out-of-school education (Republic of Indonesia, 1977, 1989, 1991).

Five studies from the *Journal of Nonformal Education* help locate the historical case within Indonesian nonformal-education scholarship. Functional literacy is influenced by perceived relevance and benefits (Laksono et al., 2018), while program quality depends on planning, resources, tutor practice, and evaluation (Sufyan et al., 2019). Community learning institutions can integrate education, facilitation, entrepreneurship, and partnership (Rahma et al., 2019). Nonformal activities may complement school-based development (Widodo & Nusantara, 2020), and contemporary equivalency education illustrates the opportunities and limitations of distance delivery and recognized progression (Arbarini et al., 2022). Nevertheless, this literature is predominantly contemporary and local. Historical accounts of Kejar Paket A frequently summarize milestones without defining the documentary corpus, distinguishing changing program functions, or assessing the institutional interests of government-affiliated publications.

This study addresses that gap by asking: How did the curriculum and institutional position of Kejar Paket A change between 1977 and 1999? Which delivery and management mechanisms enabled or constrained implementation? What level of evidence supports claims that the program contributed to social transformation? The period begins with the program's introduction and ends in the first post-New Order transition year, enabling analysis of continuity and repositioning without treating the entire period as politically uniform. The study does not estimate the net program effect. Instead, it reconstructs documented mechanisms, identifies plausible contributions, and marks claims that exceed the surviving evidence. Its contribution lies in combining historical source criticism with current nonformal-education scholarship and an explicit evidentiary framework.

METHOD

This study used a qualitative historical design to reconstruct change in Kejar Paket A and to interpret the relationship among policy, curriculum, implementation, and reported outcomes. Historical inquiry was appropriate because the research questions concern change over time, institutional context, and the credibility and meaning of documentary evidence rather than the measurement of a present-day population. The unit of analysis was the program as represented in contemporaneous documentary sources, while the analytical focus was the interaction among its formal design, field-level delivery, and claims of social change. The period 1977–1999 begins with the program's introduction and ends after the political transition of 1998, thereby capturing both New Order institutional development and immediate continuity without collapsing the entire interval into a single phase.

The principal primary-source corpus consisted of six available issues of *Gita Setra: Himbauan dari dan untuk Lapangan*, a field bulletin published in 1981, 1983, 1986, 1987, 1993, and 1999. The issues were located in collections at Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia in Bandung and BPMP Jayagiri in Lembang, supplemented by online catalog searching. Inclusion required that an issue fall within the study period and contain information on community education, Paket A learning materials, tutors, instructional methods, administration, implementation problems, or reported outcomes. The six issues form a purposive documentary corpus rather than a complete serial run. No inference was made that the selected years represented every region or all intermediate policy changes; gaps in the series were recorded as a limitation.

Three categories of contextual evidence were used for triangulation. The first comprised the 1977 ministerial decision on community-provided out-of-school education, the 1989 National Education System Law, and Government Regulation No. 73 of 1991. The second was UNESCO's 1991 national study of

Indonesia, which provides a contemporary program chronology, demographic indicators, and descriptions of materials and implementation. The third comprised scholarly literature on adult literacy, second-chance education, community learning, participation, learning outcomes, and historical literacy policy. Sixty journal articles published in 2020–2026 from journals indexed in Scopus and/or Web of Science were selected for conceptual and comparative relevance, accompanied by two foundational indexed articles and five Journal of Nonformal Education studies. These secondary sources were not treated as evidence of what occurred in Indonesia; they supported concept definition, comparison, and interpretation.

Source criticism proceeded in two stages. External criticism recorded each document's title, date, institutional provenance, authorship or corporate responsibility, physical or digital form, intended audience, and relationship to the events described. Terminological inconsistencies were checked against date and regulation because out-of-school education, nonformal education, literacy education, and equivalency education did not carry identical meanings throughout the period. Internal criticism examined the purpose and specificity of statements, internal consistency, agreement or tension across issues, compatibility with regulations and the UNESCO study, and the possibility of administrative or political bias. Because Gita Setra was linked to the government education apparatus and helped communicate policy and field practice, its procedural descriptions were separated analytically from unverified aggregate success claims.

Verified text segments were coded in a document matrix using four deductive domains derived from the research questions: institutional development and program repositioning; curriculum, methods, and media; management, tutors, and implementation constraints; and reported outcomes. Inductive subcodes were then added for target population, functional content, study-group organization, participation barriers, gender, livelihood claims, civic or attitudinal claims, certification, and evidence limitations. Each segment retained its source, year, page or location where available, and a short note on institutional context. Constant comparison was used across bulletin issues and contextual sources to identify continuity, change, contradiction, and silence. The resulting periodization was revised until each phase was supported by more than one documentary indicator or explicitly identified as tentative.

Outcome claims were mapped to five transformation domains defined in the introduction and assigned one of three confidence levels. A claim was classified as directly supported when the documents described a program input, process, access mechanism, or immediate literacy-related outcome consistently and with corroborating context. It was classified as a plausible contribution when the mechanism was credible and compatible with comparative research, but direct learner-level or longitudinal evidence was absent. It was classified as unsupported attribution when documents asserted broad economic, demographic, political, or national effects without transparent data, or when concurrent policies provided equally plausible explanations. This contribution-oriented logic reflects the wider finding that long-term effects of nonformal education are difficult to establish without longitudinal or counterfactual evidence (Simac et al., 2021).

The final interpretation combined diachronic and synchronic analysis. Diachronic analysis traced shifts across 1977–1999; synchronic analysis examined how curriculum, tutor capacity, media, regulation, and local conditions interacted within each phase. Interpretive credibility was strengthened through triangulation, explicit negative-case attention, separation of program description from outcome attribution, and an audit trail linking analytical statements to the source matrix. The study did not involve living participants or personal data. Its principal limitations are the incomplete bulletin series, the institutional perspective of surviving sources, uneven regional representation, the absence of systematic learner-level follow-up, and the inability to separate program effects from school expansion, compulsory education, public-health activity, and economic change. The findings therefore establish historical mechanisms and bounded contributions, not population-level causal effects.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Historical Development and Institutional Repositioning, 1977–1999

The documents show that Kejar Paket A was not a fixed intervention. Its target population, curricular emphasis, and relationship with formal schooling changed as national educational priorities developed. Four overlapping phases provide the most defensible reconstruction (Table 1). The boundaries are analytical rather than uniform administrative cut-off dates because materials, personnel, and policy could reach regions at different times. This periodization also prevents the early literacy program from being retrospectively described as if it had always been the standardized elementary-equivalency route known today.

Table 1. Historical phases of Kejar Paket A, 1977–1999

Period	Program emphasis	Curricular and institutional features	Historical interpretation
1977–1983	Foundational literacy	Study groups; A-series materials; reading, writing, numeracy, and Indonesian-language use.	Primarily a literacy and recovery pathway for nonschooled people and early school leavers.
1984–1988	Functional consolidation	Practical themes, productive knowledge, tutor preparation, varied media, and work-linked learning.	Functional relevance strengthened, although delivery depended on local capacity.
1989–1993	Policy integration	Formal recognition of out-of-school education and stronger connection with national basic-education objectives.	Literacy remained important while policy increasingly emphasized progression and system coordination.
1994–1999	Equivalency-oriented transition	Closer articulation with nine-year basic education, assessment, and recognized completion.	The program moved toward equivalency without fully erasing its nonformal and functional-learning legacy.

In the first phase, the central problem was access to foundational literacy among people who had not entered school or had left before acquiring stable reading, writing, and numeracy skills. The study-group model allowed learning to occur near participants' homes and outside the ordinary school schedule. The A1–A100 sequence provided a nationally recognizable progression, while tutors and peers mediated the materials. This combination placed Kejar Paket A within a longstanding conception of nonformal education as organized learning that can complement and reconnect with formal systems (La Belle, 1982; Eshach, 2007). It also resembles the recovery function described in current second-chance scholarship, although the early Indonesian program targeted literacy more directly than credential completion (Vandenabeele, 2024; Kiprianos & Mpourgos, 2022).

During the mid-1980s, documentary attention increasingly connected literacy with productive knowledge, health, family life, agriculture, and community development. This did not replace foundational skills; it reframed their purpose. Functional integration could increase perceived relevance, a recurring issue in adult-literacy participation (Demirbilek & Keser, 2023; Noreen & Iqbal, 2024). Comparable evidence from integrated functional adult education suggests credible livelihood pathways when literacy is applied to productive practices, but it also shows why such pathways should be evaluated rather than assumed (Oljira & Hailu, 2021). In the historical corpus, practical themes support a conclusion about program design and capability formation, not a measured conclusion about sustained income.

The 1989 law and 1991 regulation provided a clearer national place for out-of-school education. Policy integration could strengthen legitimacy, coordination, and progression, but it also increased the risk that

nonformal learning would be judged mainly through school-derived standards. The international history of adult-literacy policy shows that institutional continuity matters: initiatives may recede when political priority, funding, and system ownership weaken (Elfert & Walker, 2020; Fute et al., 2023). Indonesia's trajectory differed in its specific political and administrative context, yet the comparative lesson is relevant: program durability depends on the relationship among national commitment, local delivery, and credible monitoring (Stepanek Lockhart, 2022).

In the 1990s, the expansion of basic education repositioned Paket A toward recognized elementary equivalency. This transition created educational mobility for learners seeking certification and a route to further study. At the same time, standardized assessment could narrow the earlier emphasis on daily-life application. Current second-chance research similarly finds a gap between personal needs and institutional demands and shows that programs may serve qualification, belonging, and support functions simultaneously (Schuchart & Bühler-Niederberger, 2020; Van Den Berghe et al., 2024). The historical significance of Kejar Paket A therefore lies in both continuity and change: it preserved a route for excluded learners while moving closer to the formal education architecture.

This reconstruction also clarifies chronology. The Asia-Pacific Programme of Education for All, launched in 1987, could support later coordination, but it did not cause a program introduced in 1977 (UNESCO Principal Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, 1991). Likewise, the decline of illiteracy during the study period cannot be attributed exclusively to Kejar Paket A because primary-school construction, increased enrollment, compulsory education, economic change, and other literacy activities operated concurrently. The defensible historical claim is that Kejar Paket A supplied a flexible recovery mechanism within a wider educational expansion. This bounded interpretation is consistent with the evidentiary caution urged by research on the lasting effects of nonformal education (Simac et al., 2021).

Curriculum Architecture, Learning Methods, and Media

The A1–A100 materials formed the curricular spine of the early program. Their sequence moved learners from foundational symbols and numeracy toward functional information and productive application. The materials were designed for incremental mastery and flexible pacing rather than as one hundred conventional school lessons. UNESCO grouped the series into phases and reported supplementary materials integrating literacy with daily-life and income-related activities (UNESCO Principal Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, 1991). The bulletin corpus adds descriptions of booklet design, tutor guidance, media, and target-group adaptation (Gita Setra, 1981–1999). Table 2 synthesizes the recurring curriculum and delivery components without assuming identical implementation across all years and locations.

Table 2. Analytical reconstruction of curriculum and delivery

Component	Documented design	Learning mechanism	Interpretive significance
Foundational literacy	Letters, words, sentences, numbers, and Bahasa Indonesia.	Guided practice, repetition, feedback, and gradual progression.	Direct support for basic literacy and access to written information.
Functional knowledge	Health, family, agriculture, civic information, and household themes.	Discussion and application to familiar tasks.	Potentially increased relevance, depending on local adaptation.
Livelihood content	Work-related examples and selected productive skills.	Practice and connection with existing occupations.	Plausible livelihood capability; no direct proof of lasting income gains.
Flexible arrangements	Group learning, tutoring, self-study, mutual learning, and occasional work practice.	Individual pacing combined with collective support.	Reduced time and distance barriers but depended on continuity and tutor capacity.

Component	Documented design	Learning mechanism	Interpretive significance
Learning media	Booklets, posters, picture cards, pamphlets, illustrated stories, and audiovisual resources where available.	Low-cost supports linked written symbols with recognizable contexts.	Improved accessibility while creating distribution and maintenance demands.

The curriculum joined two competing logics. Sequential standardization enabled national distribution, tutor orientation, monitoring, and recognizable progression. Contextual participation required tutors and learners to connect materials with local routines, language, work, and problems. Adult literacy unfolds through diverse rhythms and relationships, so standardized content becomes educationally meaningful only when it can be interpreted and practiced in learners' circumstances (Grummell, 2023). Constructivist evidence from nonformal centres similarly emphasizes active connection between experience and new knowledge (Mayombe, 2020). Kejar Paket A was therefore most distinctly nonformal not because it lacked structure, but because its structure could be flexibly mediated.

Group learning was particularly suitable for emerging readers who needed modeling, immediate feedback, encouragement, and peer recognition. Self-study became more feasible after sufficient reading confidence developed. Mutual learning mobilized stronger participants, while tutors provided scaffolding for learners progressing at different rates. Work-linked practice connected text and numeracy with productive activity. These arrangements parallel findings that second-chance classrooms serve both academic and social purposes (Van Den Berghe et al., 2024) and that literacy practices become stronger when reading and discussion are interconnected rather than reduced to isolated exercises (Walldén, 2020). Flexibility, however, did not remove the need for deliberate planning, assessment, and sustained instructional support (Sufyan et al., 2019).

The media strategy addressed the needs of emerging readers through pictures, short texts, large print, cards, posters, and illustrated stories. Such design respected limited reading stamina and linked unfamiliar symbols to known situations. Contemporary digital scholarship extends the same principle: accessibility must be designed, not inferred from the existence of a device or platform (McGinty, 2021; Alamprese, 2024). Kejar Paket A operated in a predominantly print and face-to-face environment, so digital findings cannot be applied directly; they nevertheless illuminate a durable design rule that media should reduce, rather than add, barriers. Current organizational research also shows that new technology requires institutional readiness and educator support (Bonnes, 2024).

Assessment changed in meaning across the study period. In the literacy-oriented phase, progression through materials and the ability to use reading, writing, and numeracy in ordinary situations were primary. In the equivalency-oriented phase, assessment increasingly certified comparability with basic education. Recognized credentials could improve educational mobility, but a stronger gatekeeping function might narrow learning toward school-subject requirements. Contemporary equivalency education in Indonesia faces a related need to balance recognized standards, learner diversity, infrastructure, and distance delivery (Arbarini et al., 2022). The historical lesson is not to reject standardization, but to preserve functional relevance, supportive pacing, and accessible materials within a credible progression system.

Program Management, Tutors, and Participation Constraints

Kejar Paket A depended on a layered system that linked central curriculum and guidance with regional coordination, local study groups, tutors, community figures, and learning spaces. This structure enabled national reach without constructing a conventional school for every group. It also created long chains through which books, funds, instructions, and reports had to move. The bulletin corpus presents coordination as both an enabling mechanism and a recurrent implementation problem (Gita Setra, 1981–1999). Comparable research on community learning centres confirms that proximity and community participation can extend

access, but stable relationships among providers, communities, and public institutions are required (Belete et al., 2022; Neak & Charungkaittikul, 2023).

Tutors were the critical interface between standardized materials and local learning. They had to diagnose varied literacy levels, maintain adult learners' dignity, relate lessons to work and family life, encourage persistence, and record progress. These responsibilities exceeded the transmission of printed content. Studies of adult-education personnel show that centre managers and educators learn through workplace practice, collaboration, and institutional support (Mukeredzi, 2022), while learning-management research emphasizes the interdependence of planning, method, resources, and evaluation (Sufyan et al., 2019). Uneven tutor preparation therefore represents a central program variable rather than a minor administrative issue.

Participation constraints arose at individual, household, organizational, and structural levels. Seasonal work, caregiving, migration, fatigue, stigma, and opportunity cost could interrupt attendance. Distance, material distribution, tutor availability, and inconsistent local support added organizational barriers. Current studies demonstrate how course timing and duration affect participation (Rüter & Martin, 2022), how stigma shapes second-chance learners' experience (Raoufi-Kvist, 2025), and how participation reflects socioeconomic position and prior skills (Yamashita et al., 2022; Punksungka et al., 2022). The historical sources do not quantify each barrier, but their repeated references to continuity, recruitment, and local conditions make a solely individual explanation untenable.

Community partnerships offered one response. Community learning centres can connect educational services with local participation and institutional engagement (Agyekum et al., 2024; Aryeh-Adjei, 2026), while adult education can support community development when learning addresses collective priorities (Biney, 2025). Yet comparative research also identifies shortages of staff, resources, and program diversity (Akintolu et al., 2022). Kejar Paket A predated Indonesia's current PKBM configuration, but its study-group logic anticipated this community-facing infrastructure. Indonesian studies likewise show the potential of entrepreneurship-oriented community learning services and complementary nonformal activities (Rahma et al., 2019; Widodo & Nusantara, 2020).

The institutional record requires a political reading. Official bulletins circulated practical field information, but they also operated within a development-oriented state discourse. Reports of success could demonstrate administrative effectiveness, whereas resistance, noncompletion, or unintended effects may have been underreported. Historical analysis of literacy policy shows that education is never ideologically neutral and that documents must be situated within regimes of authority (Kim & Kang, 2021). Source criticism does not invalidate Gita Setra; it differentiates what the source can support. Repeated procedural descriptions of materials, training, and administration are more credible than broad claims that the program independently transformed income, fertility, health behavior, or national productivity.

Literacy Outcomes and Bounded Social Transformation

Table 3 summarizes the level of support for each transformation domain. The hierarchy is deliberate: it prevents a documented input or mechanism from being presented as a measured long-term outcome. Direct support is strongest where the corpus consistently describes access arrangements, curriculum, and immediate literacy purposes. Plausible contribution is used where a defensible mechanism exists but learner-level or longitudinal evidence is absent. Unsupported attribution identifies macro-level claims that cannot be isolated from concurrent change.

Table 3. Evidence matrix for claims of social transformation

Domain	Evidence in the corpus	Confidence level	Boundary of interpretation
Literacy and cognitive capability	Sequenced reading, writing, numeracy, language, and functional content.	Directly supported for program opportunity and intended capability.	No consistent national pretest–posttest or retention series.
Educational access and equity	Local groups, flexible pacing, tutoring, and a route for nonschooled people and dropouts.	Directly supported as an access mechanism.	Participation and completion cannot be fully disaggregated by region, gender, or class.
Livelihood capability	Productive themes, practical numeracy, agriculture, and work-linked learning.	Plausible contribution.	Income effects also depend on assets, markets, credit, and household labor.
Social participation	Group discussion, peer networks, civic and community information.	Plausible contribution.	No evidence isolates effects on long-term civic participation.
Attitudes and agency	Reported confidence, willingness to learn, and receptiveness to information.	Plausible but institutionally framed.	Administrative compliance is not equivalent to autonomous agency.
Macro-social change	National literacy decline and development narratives.	Unsupported as sole attribution.	School expansion, compulsory education, economic change, and other programs were concurrent.

The strongest evidence concerns access and literacy-related capability. Kejar Paket A created an organized route for people unable to use an ordinary school schedule or already beyond the expected school age. Its sequence supported movement from symbols and numbers toward functional information, while groups and tutors supplied social support. Quasi-experimental adult-literacy research demonstrates that skill development can be measured when appropriate instruments and comparison are available (Amine et al., 2025). Such evidence is not present consistently in the historical corpus. The claim here is therefore limited to widened opportunity, documented curriculum, and reported capability development rather than a precise national effect size.

Livelihood-related change is credible as a mechanism but not established as an attributable outcome. Practical numeracy, productive themes, and work-linked learning could help participants record transactions, follow written instructions, compare quantities, or interact with extension services. Integrated functional education elsewhere has been associated with livelihood contributions (Oljira & Hailu, 2021), and adult education may support community development (Biney, 2025). However, income is also shaped by land, assets, markets, credit, labor demand, and household arrangements. The evidence supports expanded livelihood capability, not a conclusion that Paket A independently produced economic mobility.

Social participation and agency are also plausible but indirect outcomes. Study groups could enlarge peer networks, normalize adult learning, and create a setting for discussing family, health, civic, and development information. Current research links informal learning and a lifelong-learning mindset with civic engagement (Haren Conely & Cordie, 2023) and finds associations among adult education, personality, and civic participation (Klinkhammer et al., 2024). Literacy and language provision may also relate to socio-political participation among migrants and language minorities (Grotlüschen et al., 2021). None of these findings proves the historical Indonesian effect; they clarify plausible pathways. Freire's distinction remains crucial: participation in official campaigns is not necessarily evidence of critical voice or autonomous agency (Freire, 2000).

Transformative outcomes become more plausible when learning is collective and connected with meaningful problems. Community environmental education, participatory adult education, critical information

literacy, arts-based learning, and movement learning demonstrate mechanisms through which participants may develop belonging, hope, interpretive capacity, and collective action (Griswold et al., 2024; Griswold, 2023; Irving, 2020; Cairns, 2025; Ollis, 2021). Kejar Paket A shared the group-based and practical character of these initiatives but operated within a more centralized state program. The comparison therefore supports mechanism-level interpretation only. It cannot justify claiming the same political or community outcomes.

Access and equity require particular attention to gender and accumulated disadvantage. Women constituted the majority of the population aged 10–44 identified as illiterate in the 1971 figures reported by UNESCO (UNESCO Principal Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, 1991). Nearby groups, flexible schedules, and practical materials could reduce barriers, but household labor, mobility, stigma, and unequal access to productive resources could still limit participation and use of learning. Recent research shows that adult-learning participation can perpetuate rather than repair inequality when opportunities are unevenly distributed (Karmaeva & Kosyakova, 2022) and that marginalized adults should not be made solely responsible for structural exclusion (Regmi, 2023). The bulletin corpus lacks the gender-disaggregated longitudinal records needed to evaluate entry, persistence, completion, and post-program use.

The program's second-chance function should also be interpreted through learners' trajectories. Studies show that age and social background influence dropout (Schuchart & Schimke, 2022), that participation can be motivated by employment, dignity, family, or interrupted schooling (Taka, 2023; Papadimitriou, 2024), and that institutional conceptions of the adult learner affect program design (Vanderavero et al., 2026). Kejar Paket A's flexibility was therefore necessary but not sufficient. A credible pathway also required sustained tutor support, recognized progression, manageable schedules, and protection from stigma. These conditions help explain why the transition toward equivalency could increase legitimacy while simultaneously risking a mismatch between school-like demands and adult circumstances.

Contemporary digital provision highlights a further implication. Digital learning can widen reach for marginalized groups when learners receive appropriate support (Yüksel-Arslan et al., 2025), yet access to devices, connectivity, digital skills, accessible materials, and organizational capacity remains uneven (Alamprese, 2024; Bonnes, 2024; McGinty, 2021). The historical program relied on low-cost print, local groups, and human mediation. Its durable lesson is media-neutral: expansion should be judged by whether the delivery system actually lowers barriers and sustains participation, not by the novelty of the technology. This principle is directly relevant to present equivalency and community learning programs.

Overall, the evidence supports a bounded model of transformation. Kejar Paket A directly widened organized access to literacy learning and offered mechanisms for cognitive and practical capability development. It plausibly contributed to livelihood competence, social participation, and educational agency when implementation was relevant, respectful, and sustained. It cannot be treated as the sole cause of national literacy decline, income growth, demographic change, or civic modernization. This conclusion accords with international evidence that adult-literacy systems require political commitment, locally responsive delivery, and credible monitoring (Malloes & dos Santos Costa, 2025; Noreen & Iqbal, 2025; Grotlüschen et al., 2025) and with the wider finding that long-term nonformal-education effects are often underdocumented (Simac et al., 2021).

For current Indonesian policy, the historical case suggests that equivalency and community education should combine recognized progression with functional literacy, flexible scheduling, accessible media, tutor development, local partnership, and disaggregated follow-up. Enrollment alone is insufficient because participation includes persistence, voice, belonging, and the ability to use learning (Karger et al., 2025). Perceived relevance and opportunity shape participation (Heuer et al., 2025), while accumulated patterns of nonparticipation require proactive support (Jenkins, 2021). The early Paket A model cannot simply be restored, but its combination of structured progression and community mediation remains a useful institutional principle.

CONCLUSION

Kejar Paket A developed from a 1977 nonformal literacy initiative using sequenced A1–A100 materials, study groups, tutoring, self-study, functional themes, and accessible media into a pathway increasingly articulated with basic-education equivalency during the 1990s. The synchronized evidence shows that its clearest historical contribution was widening organized access to literacy and strengthening selected cognitive and practical capabilities among people not adequately served by schools; livelihood, participation, and attitudinal changes remain plausible but cannot be causally attributed because the surviving bulletin series is incomplete and institutionally framed, learner-level longitudinal data are absent, and school expansion, compulsory education, welfare activity, and economic change occurred concurrently. By distinguishing the early literacy function from the later equivalency orientation and applying external and internal criticism, triangulation, thematic coding, and explicit evidentiary confidence to six Gita Setra issues, this study offers a more defensible account of nonformal education and bounded social transformation. Future research should combine additional bulletin issues, local administrative records, oral histories, gender- and region-disaggregated participation data, and comparative outcome evidence to test variation in implementation and longer-term use of learning.

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