

Older Adults' Lifelong Learning in Indonesia: Motivational Ecosystem, Institutional Design, and Family Capital

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Abstract

Background - Indonesia's aging population increases the need for community-based learning that responds to older adults' social, spiritual, and developmental needs; pesantren-based education provides a culturally embedded form of non-formal learning.

Research Urgency - Limited attention has been given to how individual, institutional, and family factors interact to sustain older adults' engagement in culturally and spiritually embedded non-formal education.

Research Objectives - This study examines factors influencing sustained engagement in a 40-day residential community education program at Pesantren Daarut Tauhiid, Bandung.

Research Method - A qualitative case study involved nine older learners, a program coordinator, and family members. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observation, and document analysis and analyzed using an interactive qualitative model.

Research Findings - Sustained engagement formed a three-pillar motivational ecosystem comprising internal motivation, institutional support, and family support. Internal motivation initiated and directed engagement, institutional support reduced barriers and enabled participation, and family support reinforced persistence.

Research Conclusion - Sustained participation emerged from the interaction of personal motivation, supportive institutional conditions, and family involvement.

Research Novelty/Contribution - The study proposes a contextually grounded motivational ecosystem that extends geragogical perspectives beyond individual-centered explanations and informs sustainable community-based education for older adults.

Keywords: community education; family capital; geragogy; lifelong learning; older adult motivation

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INTRODUCTION

The world is experiencing rapid population aging. According to the [World Health Organization \(2025\)](#), by 2030, one in six people worldwide will be aged 60 years or older, with this population projected to increase from 1 billion in 2020 to 1.4 billion in 2030 and reach 2.1 billion by 2050. Indonesia is undergoing a similar demographic transition. [Badan Pusat Statistik \(2025\)](#) reported that older adults constitute a growing proportion of the national population, accompanied by increasing life expectancy. This demographic shift presents challenges not only for healthcare and social protection but also for lifelong learning and community education ([Ackermann & Seifert, 2021](#); [Formosa, 2021](#); [Prasetyo & Kusumawardani, 2025](#)). As people live longer, educational opportunities in later life become increasingly important for supporting continued personal development, social participation, meaningful engagement, and active aging. In this context, accessible non-formal and community-based education represents an important avenue for responding to the diverse learning needs of Indonesia's growing older population ([Achmad & Zaluchu, 2024](#); [Hayat et al., 2024](#)).

Aging is often accompanied by physical, cognitive, and psychosocial changes, including declining sensory capacity, reduced mobility, chronic health conditions, and social isolation, which may constrain older adults' participation in structured learning activities ([Aji et al., 2023](#); [Lin et al., 2025](#); [Schirmer et al., 2023](#)). These conditions highlight the need for educational environments that are flexible, supportive, socially engaging, and responsive to older learners' capacities and life circumstances. At the same time, older adults continue to demonstrate strong motivation to learn when educational experiences are connected to meaning-making, social relationships, personal growth, and goals relevant to later life ([Formosa, 2021](#); [Hachem, 2023](#); [Jin, 2024](#); [Zhu, 2022](#)). Non-formal community education is therefore particularly relevant because it can provide learning opportunities beyond conventional educational institutions while accommodating the social, cultural, and personal characteristics of older learners ([Adeoye et al., 2024](#); [Darmawan et al., 2025](#); [Pihlainen et al., 2021](#)). Understanding what enables older adults not only to enter such programs but also to sustain their engagement is consequently important for the development of effective elderly education ([Hariastuti et al., 2024](#)).

Geragogy provides a useful perspective for understanding these learning processes by emphasizing educational approaches that respond specifically to older adults' experiences, motivations, and learning needs ([de Lima Flauzino et al., 2022](#); [Gates & Wilson-Menzfeld, 2022](#); [Jin, 2024](#)). Rather than treating older adults simply as adult learners at a later age, geragogical approaches recognize the importance of accumulated life experience, intrinsic and meaning-oriented motivation, supportive social relationships, and learning environments adapted to later-life conditions. However, existing research on older adult learning has often examined motivational, institutional, or social factors separately, while much of the literature has emerged from Western or relatively formal educational contexts. Consequently, less is known about how these factors interact to sustain learning engagement within culturally embedded, non-formal community settings in the Global South. In particular, an integrated motivational model that explains the interaction among internal motivation, institutional support, and family support remains underexplored in Indonesian pesantren-based elderly education ([Boffo et al., 2025](#); [Cheng, 2024](#); [Hachem, 2023](#); [Martinez et al., 2025](#); [Ren & Klausen, 2024](#)). This gap also aligns with recent non-formal education studies emphasizing context-responsive learning design and systematic identification of community learning needs ([Purnomo et al., 2024](#); [Saripah et al., 2025](#)).

This study addresses this gap through an in-depth examination of the Masa Keemasan (PMK) program at Pesantren Daarut Tauhiid, Bandung, Indonesia. PMK is a 40-day residential community education program that has served older learners across 57 consecutive cohorts and attracts participants from different regions of Indonesia, including Jakarta, Tangerang, Yogyakarta, Sidoarjo, and Kudus. Its residential structure, spiritually embedded learning environment, institutional support system, and involvement of participants' families provide a distinctive context for examining how multiple motivational influences operate together over an extended learning period. Rather than focusing solely on why older adults initially participate, this study investigates the factors that enable them to sustain engagement throughout the program. Accordingly, three

research questions guide the study: (1) What internal motivational factors influence older adults' sustained engagement in the PMK program? (2) How does institutional support facilitate and sustain their learning engagement? and (3) How does family support enable and reinforce sustained participation?

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative approach with a single-case embedded design, consistent with contemporary guidance on qualitative case study research and information-rich case selection ([Alam, 2021](#); [Mtisi, 2022](#)). The case is the PMK program at Pesantren Daarut Tauhiid, selected through criterion-based purposive sampling for its information-rich characteristics: extended program duration (40 days), elderly-exclusive participant profile, and exceptional cohort continuity (57 cohorts). The embedded units of analysis include individual elderly learners, the program management system, and family support networks.

Participants

Nine participants were recruited through purposive sampling (see Table 1). Inclusion criteria for elderly learners were: age ≥ 55 years, enrollment in PMK cohort 57, and willingness to participate in extended narrative interviews. The program coordinator was selected for institutional expertise, and family members were recruited as the spouses or adult children of participating elderly learners.

Table 1. Participant Profile

Code	Age	Gender	Last Occupation	City of Origin	Role in Study
WB1	66	Male	Civil Servant (Ret.)	Serang, Banten	Elderly Learner
WB2	72	Female	Teacher (Ret.)	Bandung, West Java	Elderly Learner
WB3	68	Male	Entrepreneur	Yogyakarta, DIY	Elderly Learner
WB4	61	Female	Teacher / Homemaker (Ret.)	Tangerang, Banten	Elderly Learner
DS	38	Female	Program Coordinator	Bandung, West Java	Program Manager
K1–K4	–	Mixed	Adult Children / Spouses	Various	Family Member

Data Collection

Three methods were used over a three-month fieldwork period (June–August 2025). Semi-structured in-depth interviews (45–90 minutes each) were audio-recorded with informed consent and transcribed verbatim. Non-participant observation was conducted during program activities including Quranic recitation sessions (khalaqoh), devotional routines, health consultations, and social activities, with systematic field notes. Documentary analysis covered institutional curriculum documents, program schedules, SAMASA alumni organizational records, and photographic materials. The combination of interviews, observation, and document analysis followed qualitative case-study practice, while triangulation and member-checking were used to strengthen credibility ([Adler, 2022](#); [Mtisi, 2022](#)).

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed through an interactive qualitative process comprising data condensation (initial and focused coding), data display (matrices and thematic maps), and conclusion drawing/verification. Structural coding organized data according to the three research questions. Contemporary qualitative guidance supports systematic coding, data display, iterative interpretation, and transparent documentation of analytical decisions ([Alam, 2021](#)). Credibility was enhanced through prolonged engagement (90+ days), peer debriefing, and

member-checking; transferability through thick description; and confirmability through reflexive journaling and an audit trail, consistent with recent discussions of qualitative trustworthiness (Adler, 2022). All participants provided written informed consent; data were anonymized and stored securely in compliance with Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia ethics guidelines.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis revealed that sustained learning engagement among older adults emerged from the interaction of three interdependent dimensions: internal motivation, program support, and family support. Rather than operating independently, these dimensions formed a motivational ecosystem in which personal motives-initiated engagement, program conditions enabled continued participation, and family involvement reinforced learners' capacity and commitment to remain engaged. Figure 1 presents this relationship at the conceptual level.

Internal motivation	Program support	Family support
Why older adults want to continue learning	How the learning environment enables continued participation	How significant others reinforce and enable participation

Figure 1. Three-Pillar Motivational Ecosystem of Older Adult Learning Engagement

Internal Motivation: From Life Reflection to Purposeful Learning

Internal motivation emerged as a process through which older adults interpreted later-life experiences and transformed them into purposeful learning goals. To avoid conceptual overlap among the original categories of religious knowledge, existential awareness, and spiritual beliefs, the findings were reorganized into three analytically distinct dimensions: biographical reflection, existential-spiritual meaning, and purposeful learning orientation.

Table 2. Internal Motivational Dimensions and Their Functions in Sustaining Learning Engagement

Dimension	Core Meaning	Motivational Function	Representative Evidence
Biographical Reflection	Reflection on retirement, loss, past responsibilities, and perceived shortcomings	Triggers reconsideration of priorities and renewed interest in learning	"I was busy with work; religious practice was left for last. Now retired, I feel empty it pushed me to learn again." (WB2)
Existential-Spiritual Meaning	Awareness of mortality and interpretation of later life through spiritual beliefs	Gives learning personal urgency and deeper meaning	"I am 66; even the Prophet was given only 63 years. God has given me three bonus years; I must not waste them." (WB3)
Purposeful Learning Orientation	Desire for self-improvement, spiritual closeness, and khusnul khatimah	Converts reflection and meaning into sustained commitment to learning	"My only goal is to be forgiven, to be close to Allah, and to end this life well." (WB3)

Biographical reflection served as an important motivational trigger. Retirement, bereavement, changing social roles, and reflection on earlier priorities prompted participants to reconsider how they wanted to use later life. Learning was therefore not experienced simply as acquiring new knowledge, but as a response to

biographical transition. This supports the view that later-life learning can emerge from reinterpretations of accumulated life experience, changing identity, and renewed purpose ([Hachem, 2023](#); [Heinz et al., 2023](#)).

However, reflection alone did not explain sustained engagement. Participants interpreted these transitions through an existential-spiritual framework, particularly awareness of limited remaining time and responsibility for how later life should be lived. Mortality awareness gave learning a sense of urgency, while spiritual beliefs provided meaning that helped participants persist despite physical and emotional challenges. Rather than treating existential awareness and spiritual belief as separate motivational categories, the findings suggest that they operate together: awareness of life's finitude becomes motivationally powerful when interpreted through a meaningful spiritual framework. This relationship is consistent with recent studies emphasizing purpose, meaning, and spirituality as important resources in later life ([AshaRani et al., 2022](#); [Kim et al., 2023](#); [Manoiu et al., 2023](#); [Nagata & Tanaka, 2024](#)).

These reflections ultimately developed into a purposeful learning orientation. Participants articulated goals such as improving themselves, becoming closer to God, correcting perceived shortcomings, and preparing for khusnul khatimah. Goal orientation therefore represents the behavioral direction of the internal motivational process: biographical experiences generate reflection, existential-spiritual interpretation gives that reflection meaning, and personally significant goals translate it into sustained learning commitment. Recent evidence similarly connects meaning, purpose, and goal-oriented mindsets with adaptation and well-being in later life ([Heinz et al., 2023](#); [Lawton et al., 2024](#)), while the present findings show that goals in this culturally embedded context may be oriented toward transcendent rather than primarily instrumental outcomes.

Program Support as a Motivational Enabling Mechanism

Program support influenced engagement not simply because particular services or facilities were available, but because these conditions reduced participation barriers, strengthened psychological safety, and maintained social connection. The analytical focus is therefore placed on what institutional support did for learners' motivation rather than on the individual components of the program. This interpretation is consistent with evidence that structured, responsive facilitation and supportive learning environments can strengthen confidence, participation, and continued engagement among adult and older learners ([Dumasari et al., 2024](#); [Martínez-Alcalá et al., 2024](#); [Oppl et al., 2024](#)).

Table 3. Mechanisms through Which Program Support Sustains Older Adult Learning Engagement

Support Mechanism	Function for Older Learners	Influence on Sustained Engagement
Barrier Reduction	Accommodates health, mobility, and practical learning needs	Makes continued participation physically and practically manageable
Psychological Safety	Provides responsive facilitation and supportive instruction	Strengthens confidence and reduces anxiety about learning
Social Belonging	Creates meaningful peer and facilitator relationships	Increases attachment to the learning community
Learning Continuity	Provides structured and age-responsive learning experiences	Maintains direction, relevance, and momentum over time

Source: Field data and document analysis.

First, institutional support functioned through barrier reduction. Participants entered the program with different health conditions, mobility capacities, and learning needs. Program responsiveness to these differences reduced the practical costs of continued participation. The significance of these provisions therefore lies not in the facilities themselves, but in their capacity to prevent age-related limitations from becoming reasons for withdrawal. This is particularly relevant to older adult education, where health, mobility, and digital-access barriers can constrain sustained participation ([Aji et al., 2023](#); [Lin et al., 2025](#); [Schirmer et al., 2023](#)).

Second, support created psychological safety. Participants described facilitators as patient, attentive, and responsive to individual learning difficulties. Such interaction was especially important when learners encountered difficulties in religious learning or felt uncertain about their abilities. The program coordinator summarized this orientation by explaining that facilitators were encouraged to treat participants with the care they would offer their own parents. This relational approach helped transform institutional support into motivational reassurance, allowing older learners to remain engaged without experiencing learning difficulties as personal failure ([Boffo et al., 2025](#); [Dumasari et al., 2024](#); [Gates & Wilson-Menzfeld, 2022](#); [Oppl et al., 2024](#)).

Third, the program fostered social belonging. Relationships with peers and facilitators turned participation from an individual educational activity into membership in a learning community. This social dimension continued beyond the residential period through the SAMASA alumni network. Its motivational significance lies in extending learners' sense of belonging beyond program completion, thereby reducing the discontinuity that can occur when intensive learning programs end ([Boffo et al., 2025](#); [Hamzah et al., 2024](#); [Pihlainen et al., 2021](#)). Taken together, these findings indicate that institutional design influences motivation indirectly. Program structures become motivationally significant when they remove barriers, protect learners' confidence, create belonging, and maintain learning continuity. This shifts the interpretation of program support from a collection of facilities and activities toward a geragogically responsive environment that enables initial motivation to develop into sustained engagement.

Family Support as a Mediating Enabler

Family support operated as a mediating mechanism between learners' personal intentions and their actual capacity to participate. Four forms of support—evaluative, instrumental, informational, and emotional were identified, but their significance lies in their combined capacity to reinforce decisions, reduce access barriers, and maintain emotional security.

Table 4. Family Support Functions in Older Adult Learning Engagement

Function	Role in Participation	Motivational Effect
Evaluative	Affirms and encourages the decision to participate	Reinforces confidence and perceived value of learning
Instrumental	Reduces logistical and practical barriers	Makes participation feasible
Informational	Facilitates access to program information	Connects learners with educational opportunities
Emotional	Provides reassurance and psychological security	Helps sustain engagement during difficulties

Source: Family member interviews and observation.

The findings show that family members were not merely external supporters but active educational access intermediaries. In several cases, adult children helped identify the program, navigate digital registration, arrange transportation, and encourage participation. This role was particularly significant when older adults faced technological or logistical barriers. Family involvement therefore helped convert an individual desire to learn into actual educational participation, consistent with recent evidence on intergenerational help, family support, and older adults' access to learning and technology ([Cheng, 2024](#); [Hamzah et al., 2024](#); [Martinez et al., 2025](#); [Ren & Klausen, 2024](#)).

Family support also remained important after enrollment. Emotional reassurance and continued communication helped learners manage homesickness, health concerns, and the demands of an extended residential program. Rather than functioning as four isolated forms of assistance, family support collectively

created a supportive bridge between learners' personal aspirations and the demands of institutional participation. This is particularly relevant in contexts where older adults' educational decisions remain closely embedded within family relationships. This relational embedding is consistent with evidence that family presence, intergenerational support, and local social environments can support older adults' participation and independence ([Achmad & Zaluchu, 2024](#); [Cheng, 2024](#); [Martinez et al., 2025](#)).

The Motivational Ecosystem: Interaction Across Three Levels

The central finding of this study is that sustained learning engagement cannot be adequately explained by any single motivational factor. The three dimensions operated synergistically rather than additively. Internal motivation provided the initial reason and personal meaning for learning. Program support created conditions in which that motivation could be maintained despite physical, psychological, and social barriers. Family support connected personal aspiration with access and persistence by supplying practical and emotional resources.

Personal meaning and purpose → motivation to learn → institutional conditions enabling participation → family reinforcement and resource support → sustained learning engagement

Importantly, this process was not strictly linear. Difficulties experienced during participation could be buffered by program or family support, while positive experiences within the program could reinforce learners' original internal motivation. Sustained engagement therefore emerged from a reciprocal relationship between individual agency, institutional affordances, and family resources, consistent with ecological and relational perspectives on later-life participation ([Cheng, 2024](#); [Lee & Martin, 2023](#); [Ren & Klausen, 2024](#)).

Comparison with Prior Studies and Contribution

Previous studies have established several important explanations for older adults' learning participation. Research in Indonesian religious and community settings has highlighted spiritual motivation, self-development, and social needs ([Achmad & Zaluchu, 2024](#); [Farihin et al., 2021](#)), while international studies have emphasized autonomy, personal growth, social engagement, and the role of biographical transitions ([Formosa, 2021](#); [Hachem, 2023](#)). Recent work in non-formal education likewise underscores the importance of identifying community learning needs and designing flexible learning opportunities that respond to local contexts ([Hayat et al., 2024](#); [Purnomo et al., 2024](#)). Earlier research at the PMK setting has also identified internal and external sources of motivation.

However, these explanations largely address individual motivational factors or particular sources of external support separately. What remains insufficiently explained is how these different levels interact to sustain engagement over time, particularly within culturally and spiritually embedded non-formal education in Indonesia. The present study addresses this gap by conceptualizing older adult learning motivation as an integrated motivational ecosystem rather than as a set of isolated determinants. Its contribution lies in demonstrating that sustained engagement is produced through the interaction of three analytically distinct but interdependent levels: internal meaning and purpose, institutional enabling conditions, and family-based resources ([Formosa, 2021](#); [Lin et al., 2025](#); [Prasetyo & Kusumawardani, 2025](#); [Saripah et al., 2025](#)).

This perspective extends existing geragogical research in two ways. First, it shifts attention from why older adults initially choose to learn toward how their engagement is sustained. Second, it demonstrates that motivation in later-life learning is socially and institutionally embedded rather than exclusively individual. In the Indonesian pesantren context examined here, spiritual meaning provides an important motivational foundation, but its translation into sustained participation depends on supportive institutional conditions and family involvement.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that elderly learning motivation in community education programs is a complex, ecologically embedded phenomenon sustained by the interplay of three interdependent pillars: internal motivational forces rooted in life experience and meaning-seeking; multi-dimensional institutional program support that reduces practical and emotional barriers; and family-level enabling structures that mediate between individual aspiration and institutional participation. The five internal motivational factors life experience, knowledge capital, existential awareness, spiritual beliefs, and goal orientation provided the motivational substrate. The dual-architecture program support system translated motivation into sustained behavioral engagement. Family support served as the critical enabling layer connecting individual aspiration to institutional access. These findings carry three sets of practical implications. For community education program designers: investing in holistic participant support systems including pre-enrollment health assessment, 24-hour facilitation, accessible physical infrastructure, and post-program alumni communities significantly enhances elderly participation and persistence. For family practitioners and social workers: equipping adult children and spouses with structured knowledge of how to serve as effective learning support agents represents a high-leverage strategy for expanding elderly education access. For policymakers: community-based education institutions represent vital and underutilized nodes in the national lifelong learning infrastructure, capable of reaching elderly populations underserved by formal educational channels. Limitations of this study include the single-site, single-cohort design and the purposive sample. Future research should extend these findings through comparative multi-site studies, longitudinal designs tracking outcomes beyond program completion, and mixed-methods approaches to develop quantitative instruments measuring the motivational constructs identified here across larger populations.

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