

# Optimizing the “Kawan Belajar” Learning Community to Enhance Teacher Collaboration at SMP Negeri 4 Pahae Julu

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The transformation of education in the modern era requires the enhancement of teacher professionalism through innovative and student-centered collaboration. This study aims to examine in depth the implementation of learning communities, the forms of teacher collaboration, and the optimization strategies of learning communities in improving teacher collaboration at SMP Negeri 4 Pahae Julu. This research employs a descriptive qualitative approach to comprehensively describe the phenomenon based on real conditions in the field. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation, with research subjects selected using purposive sampling, including the principal, the learning community coordinator, and teachers. The findings indicate that the learning community “Kawan Belajar” (KaBel) at SMP Negeri 4 Pahae Julu has been implemented regularly, systematically, and sustainably. Its implementation emphasizes a dialogic atmosphere that enables teachers to share experiences, discuss challenges, and collectively reflect on their teaching practices. Teacher collaboration is clearly reflected in joint planning, implementation, and evaluation of learning activities. The optimization of the learning community is supported by the strategic leadership of the principal as a facilitator, the active commitment of teachers, the utilization of digital technology, and periodic evaluation mechanisms. In conclusion, the “KaBel” learning community has proven to be an effective platform for fostering a collaborative and innovative learning culture, enhancing teachers’ professional capacity, and improving the quality of learning in schools, in line with the spirit of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum.

**Keywords:** Learning Community, Teacher Collaboration, Teacher Professionalism, Merdeka Curriculum.

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## 1. Introduction

The development of education in the modern era demands transformation in various aspects of learning, including the improvement of human resources quality, particularly teachers. Teachers are no longer solely responsible for delivering content but also act as facilitators who are capable of creating innovative, collaborative, and student-centered learning environments. Therefore, enhancing teacher professionalism has become an inevitable necessity in efforts to improve the overall quality of education.

One important aspect of developing teacher professionalism is the ability to collaborate. Teacher collaboration is a form of professional cooperation that enables the exchange of knowledge, experiences, and effective teaching strategies. Through collaboration, teachers can support one another in planning, implementing, and evaluating instruction, resulting in higher-quality learning processes (Kasmawati, 2020; Ningsih et al., 2024). In addition, collaboration contributes to building a sustainable culture of shared learning within the school environment.

In the context of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, the government, through the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek), encourages the establishment of learning communities as a platform for teacher professional development. A learning community is a group of teachers and educational staff who collaboratively and continuously engage in shared learning activities to improve the quality of instruction (Kemendikbudristek, 2023). This community functions not only as a discussion forum but also as a space for sharing best practices, reflecting on teaching, and collectively solving problems.

SMP Negeri 4 Pahae Julu is one of the schools that has implemented a learning community through the “Kawan Belajar” (KaBel) program. This community serves as a platform for teachers to enhance their competencies while strengthening collaboration in teaching. Based on this phenomenon, this study aims to examine in depth the implementation of the learning community, the forms of teacher collaboration, and the optimization of the learning community in improving teacher collaboration at the school.

## 2. Literature Review

A learning community is a collaborative platform that involves teachers and educational staff in sharing knowledge, experiences, and teaching practices in a continuous manner. In the educational context, a learning community functions not only as a discussion forum but also as a structured professional development medium oriented toward improving the quality of learning. According to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek, 2023), a learning community is a group of educators who collaboratively engage in shared learning activities to enhance their competencies and improve students’ learning outcomes. In line with this, Arifin and Hanif (2024) state that a learning community represents a form of professional collaboration that enables teachers to support, motivate, and exchange ideas to achieve more effective learning objectives. Therefore, learning communities serve as an essential instrument in fostering a culture of continuous learning within the school environment.

Teacher collaboration is one of the key aspects of a learning community that contributes to improving professionalism and the quality of teaching. Collaboration is not limited to joint implementation of instruction but also includes collaborative planning, reflection, and evaluation of the learning process. Kasmawati (2020) explains that teacher collaboration is a professional activity involving the exchange of knowledge, skills, and experiences to enhance teachers’ competencies. This is further supported by Ningsih et al. (2024), who state that collaboration among teachers can improve instructional effectiveness and positively impact student learning outcomes. Moreover, through collaboration, teachers can provide constructive feedback, share best practices, and develop innovative teaching approaches that are more relevant to students’ needs. Thus, teacher collaboration becomes a key element in creating high-quality and sustainable learning.

Optimizing learning communities is a strategic effort to ensure that their activities are carried out effectively and have a tangible impact on improving teachers’ competencies. This optimization can be achieved through various strategies, such as strengthening members’ commitment, ensuring strong leadership support from the principal, implementing structured activities, and utilizing technology in the learning process. Ferayanti et al. (2024) emphasize that an optimal learning community is characterized by continuous collaborative activities, collective reflection, and systematic evaluation. In addition, Sadriani et al. (2023) highlight the importance of utilizing technology as a supporting tool to expand access to information and strengthen interactions among community members. Therefore, optimizing learning communities not only enhances teacher collaboration but also fosters innovation in teaching and improves the overall quality of education.

### 3. Method

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive design to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon based on real conditions in the field. This approach was chosen because it is capable of comprehensively describing the implementation of the learning community and its role in enhancing teacher collaboration. The research was conducted at SMP Negeri 4 Pahae Julu, with participants consisting of the principal, the learning community coordinator, and teachers selected through purposive sampling. This technique was used based on the consideration that the informants possess relevant knowledge and experience related to the focus of the study (Malahati et al., 2023; Subhaktiyasa, 2024).

Several methods are commonly used in qualitative research, including observation, interviews, and documentation, to obtain comprehensive data related to the implementation of the learning community. These three methods are often used simultaneously to enhance the validity and reliability of the data. The selection of appropriate methods depends on the research objectives and the type of data to be collected. By employing a combination of observation, interviews, and documentation, researchers are able to obtain richer and more in-depth information, resulting in research findings that are more comprehensive and trustworthy (Putri H.J & Murhayati S., 2025).

### 4. Results and Discussion

The research findings indicate that the learning community at SMP Negeri 4 Pahae Julu, known as “Kawan Belajar” (KaBel), has been implemented regularly, systematically, and sustainably as part of the school’s teacher professional development program. These activities are conducted on a weekly basis with a structured agenda that has been carefully designed. The implementation of the learning community is not merely formal in nature, but also emphasizes a dialogic and participatory atmosphere, enabling teachers to be actively involved in discussions and reflective processes. In practice, the learning community serves as a professional interaction space that provides opportunities for teachers to share experiences, discuss instructional challenges, and reflect on their classroom practices. This indicates that the learning community functions as a form of collective learning aimed at improving the quality of teaching and learning.

The implementation of the learning community in this school also reflects a strong collective commitment from all members of the school community in building a shared learning culture. The principal plays a strategic role as an instructional leader who not only provides administrative support but is also directly involved as a facilitator in learning community activities. This role is crucial in creating a conducive collaborative climate and encouraging active teacher participation. Teachers, as community members, demonstrate a high level of engagement in every activity, including discussions, sharing best practices, and reflecting on teaching. This condition is consistent with the findings of Fitri et al. (2022), which emphasize that effective school leadership can foster a strong culture of collaboration within the school environment. Furthermore, activities within the learning community show that teachers are actively involved in various professional practices that support the enhancement of pedagogical competence. Teachers engage in discussions about innovative teaching approaches and strategies, collaboratively develop instructional materials, and evaluate the effectiveness of the teaching methods they have implemented. In addition, teachers share experiences from various professional development activities such as training sessions, seminars, and webinars, facilitating an internal knowledge transfer process. These interactions not only broaden teachers’ perspectives but also strengthen their professional capacity in addressing increasingly complex educational challenges. Thus, the learning community functions as a platform for continuous learning grounded in real classroom experiences.

Teacher collaboration within the learning community is clearly reflected in various collective activities. Teachers no longer work individually but collaboratively in planning, implementing, and evaluating instruction. This collaboration includes discussions in developing lesson plans, exchanging teaching strategies, and reflecting on achieved learning outcomes. Through this process, teachers can provide constructive feedback to one another and develop shared solutions to various instructional challenges. This aligns with Syaiful (2020), who states that teacher collaboration is a form of professional cooperation that can enhance the quality of learning through the synergy of knowledge and experience.

In addition to strengthening collaboration, the learning community also plays a role in fostering the creation of innovative teaching practices. Teachers are encouraged to develop various learning strategies that are creative, adaptive, and aligned with students' characteristics. The process of discussion and reflection conducted collectively enables teachers to gain new perspectives as well as innovative ideas that can be applied in the classroom. Through intensive interaction among teachers, a process of collective knowledge construction occurs, which contributes to improving the quality of teaching practices. This indicates that the learning community functions not only as a forum for sharing but also as a space for innovation that drives positive changes in the learning process.

The optimization of the learning community at SMP Negeri 4 Pahae Julu is carried out through various integrated and sustainable strategies. One of the main factors supporting this optimization is the active commitment of all community members to participate in every activity. In addition, strong leadership from the school principal serves as a key factor in ensuring the continuity of the learning community program. The use of technology also plays an important role in optimizing the learning community, particularly through digital platforms such as Ruang GTK, which allow teachers to access various learning resources and share best practices more broadly. This is in line with Sadriani et al. (2023), who emphasize that the use of technology can strengthen continuous professional development for teachers.

The evaluation of learning community activities is conducted periodically as part of efforts to improve program quality. This evaluation process is carried out through collective reflection to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the activities that have been implemented. The results of the evaluation are then used as a basis for designing subsequent activities to make them more effective and relevant to teachers' needs. This process shows that the learning community has a development mechanism that is adaptive and responsive to the dynamics within the school environment. Thus, the learning community functions not only as a discussion forum but also as a sustainable, evaluation-based professional development system.

The findings of this study reinforce previous research indicating that learning communities play a strategic role in improving teacher competence and collaboration (Henita et al., 2025; Yuliarsih et al., 2024). The existence of a learning community is able to create a collaborative, reflective, and innovative learning culture within the school environment. Therefore, the learning community can serve as an effective strategy for improving the quality of education, particularly in addressing the challenges of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, which requires flexibility, creativity, and collaboration in teaching and learning.

## 5. Conclusion

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that the learning community at SMP Negeri 4 Pahae Julu, known as "Kawan Belajar" (KaBel), has been implemented regularly, systematically, and sustainably as an integral part of teachers' professional development efforts. The implementation of this learning community is not only a formal discussion forum but has also evolved into a collaborative space that encourages the exchange of knowledge, experiences, and reflective teaching practices. Through scheduled and systematic activities, the learning community is able to foster a culture of shared learning within the

school environment, where teachers are actively involved in improving their competencies. Teacher collaboration within this community is reflected in joint lesson planning, the implementation of innovative teaching strategies, as well as evaluation and reflection on the learning process that has been carried out. Furthermore, the optimization of the learning community is supported by various strategic factors, such as the leadership of the principal who acts as a facilitator and driving force, the active participation of teachers as community members, the use of technology as a supporting tool for learning, and the implementation of continuous evaluation. The synergy among these factors makes the learning community an effective platform for enhancing both collaboration and teacher competence. The impact is reflected not only in the improvement of teachers' professional capacity but also in the quality of learning, which becomes more innovative, adaptive, and student-centered. Therefore, the learning community can be regarded as a relevant and effective strategy in supporting the improvement of educational quality, particularly in the context of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in schools.

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