**Higher Education for Equity: the PSDKU’s or Branch Campus’s Role in Enhancing Social Mobility through Inclusive Access**

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Received: 2021-October-15

Rev. Req: 2022-January-09

Accepted: 2022-January-22

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| How to cite this paper: Pilotti, M. & Almubarak. H. A. M. (2021). Systematic Versus Informal Application of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy: Are Performance Outcomes Different? A Study of College Students. *Journal of Culture and Values in Education*, *4*(2), 14-26. <https://doi.org/10.5758/ijls.2022.1>  This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license [(https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) |

**ABSTRACT:** *This study examines the role of branch campuses (PSDKU) in enhancing social mobility and community development in Indonesia, focusing on Surabaya State University Campus 5 Magetan. The research aims to explore how PSDKU facilitates inclusive access to higher education, promotes spatial justice, and fosters socio-economic empowerment in marginalized regions. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis involving key informants such as students, alumni, lecturers, and community members. The findings reveal that PSDKU significantly improves access to quality education, reduces geographical and economic barriers, and enhances local economic ecosystems through job creation and skills training. It also strengthens community capacity and social networks, positioning PSDKU as a catalyst for sustainable regional development. This study underscores the importance of branch campuses as agents of social transformation, offering a model for equitable education and community empowerment.*

**Keywords:** *Social mobility, spatial justice, inclusive education, community empowerment, higher education, regional development.*

1. **INTRODUCTION**

Inequality in access to higher education is a structural challenge that haunts social development in developing countries, including Indonesia. Although higher education is recognized as a strategic path for vertical social mobility (Torche, 2014), its distribution is still geographically and socially unequal. Educational policies that are oriented towards market efficiency often deepen spatial injustice, leaving rural areas and low-income groups in conditions of educational deprivation (Beach et al., 2018; Goastellec & Välimaa, 2019). The principle of spatial justice is important in designing inclusive education policies (Adegeye & Coetzee, 2019), because this inequality not only reduces educational participation in marginalized areas but also strengthens the reproduction of intergenerational social inequality (Narwana & Gill, 2022). In this context, the development of branch campuses or Study Programs Outside the Main Campus (PSDKU) is a promising strategy. C-BERT data records 333 International Branch Campuses in the world, with China as the largest recipient (S. Wilkins & Rumbley, 2019), while in Indonesia there are 413 PSDKU study programs in 2025 (PDDIKTI, 2025). This phenomenon raises crucial questions about the effectiveness of educational institutions in encouraging social mobility amidst structural and geographical inequalities. This study seeks to answer these questions by examining the role of PSDKU as an agent of inclusive education, community development, and spatial justice-based transformation (Boyle & Anderson, 2020) (Schendel & Mccowan, 2016) (Anderson, 2017).

Studies on the influence of educational institutions on social mobility generally emphasize the role of higher education as a channel for vertical mobility, especially in developed countries (Dickson & Macmillan, 2020; Gu et al., 2022; Torche, 2018). However, research on the contribution of branch campuses in developing countries is still limited and often focuses on international universities in large cities. There are three main tendencies in these studies: first, the assumption that higher education automatically creates social mobility without considering spatial context and disparities; second, the focus on academic achievement and access to higher education, rather than the trajectory of implications for the surrounding community; Third, the emphasis on education as social and cultural capital. Various studies have shown that higher education plays an important role in opening up opportunities for improving individuals' social and economic status (Findler et al., 2019; Tien et al., 2022; Žalėnienė & Pereira, 2021). However, many studies tend to focus solely on the aspect of access, without elaborating on the quality of educational institutions and the socio-economic context that shapes educational outcomes. In the context of marginalized areas, increasing access can indeed expand educational participation, but does not necessarily guarantee sustainable vertical social mobility. This is where it is important to pay attention to institutional dimensions such as reputation, social legitimacy, and campus integration in local networks. Therefore, educational institutions cannot be viewed merely as neutral channels, but as active agents in mediating the relations between education, work, and social status. However, research that examines these institutional functions in depth in the context of branch campuses in developing countries is still very limited, and this is the gap that this study aims to fill.

Educational institutions have historically played a central role in the processes of social reproduction and transformation (Morgenshtern & Schmid, 2022; Smith & Seal, 2021). In addition to being learning spaces, these institutions are also sites of production and transmission of social and cultural capital, which influence the distribution of opportunities in society (Ballengee et al., 2022; Lanau & Matolcsi, 2024; Triana et al., 2023). Vertical social mobility depends not only on academic achievement, but also on the symbolic legitimacy of the institution and the strength of social networks that support graduates' transition to the labor market (Marginson 2016). In marginalized areas, the challenges are more complex because institutions must respond to resource constraints, build social trust, and create new economic opportunities. Integration with the public and private sectors is crucial in strengthening campus contributions to community development and graduates' employability (Aboobaker et al., 2019; Van den Broeck et al., 2010). Social mobility itself is a key concept in sociology, which refers to the movement of individuals or groups between social strata, both vertically and horizontally (Jiang & Kung, 2021; Mushayanyama et al., 2023). Higher education, in particular, is often seen as a primary means of improving socio-economic status through the accumulation of human capital (Chankseliani & McCowan, 2021). However, its effectiveness is heavily influenced by structural factors such as family background, social networks, and cultural economic conditions. Without institutional quality, social legitimacy, and access to professional networks, education does not automatically generate mobility (Durst & Huszár, 2022). In developing countries like Indonesia, barriers such as geographic disparities and resource inequality weaken the function of education as a driver of social mobility (Raghunath, 2020). Therefore, this study positions branch campuses as strategic spaces to evaluate the role of higher education in driving social transformation amidst spatial and economic inequality.

Investigations into branch campuses predominantly concentrate on enhancing access to higher education in underrepresented regions, highlighting the augmented involvement of marginalized demographics. However, this methodology is often administrative and descriptive, lacking substantial exploration of its long-term effects on social mobility (Goastellec & Välimaa, 2019; Molokova, 2021). Access is insufficient without evaluating the institution's quality, symbolic legitimacy, and its connection to local socio-economic frameworks. This study contends that the efficacy of branch campuses in facilitating vertical social mobility is contingent upon the acknowledgment of institutional status, campus-community dynamics, and labor market integration (Francis et al., 2017), particularly for graduates from marginalized regions who encounter numerous obstacles, including resource scarcity and quality stigma (Arifin, 2017). Consequently, it is essential for branch campuses to cultivate legitimacy, forge community partnerships, and engage with regional economic networks to foster inclusive and sustained social mobility. This study seeks to address this gap by framing branch campuses as entities that not only facilitate access but also serve as agents of social transformation, capable of actively addressing spatial and socio-economic disparities. This study begins with the premise that branch campuses function not solely as instruments for the reproduction of cultural capital (Goastellec & Välimaa, 2019; Torche, 2021), but as active participants within a multifaceted network of education, legitimacy, and economic empowerment. The specific objectives are to: (1) delineate the contributions of branch campuses to the social and economic empowerment of local communities; (2) examine the institutional dynamics that affect graduates' social mobility trajectories; and (3) develop a theoretical framework concerning the role of branch campuses in development grounded in spatial justice.

1. **LITERATURE REVIEW**

**Higher Education as an Instrument of Social Mobility**

Higher education is widely recognized as a key driver of vertical social mobility, especially in developing countries. It equips individuals with essential skills and serves as a pathway to overcome socioeconomic barriers. Studies have shown that increased access to quality education enhances social mobility, as seen in Jakarta where educational programs improve occupational prospects for disadvantaged groups (Arifin, 2017; Rihe Riwoe et al., 2023). (Torche, 2021) notes that expanding educational opportunities fosters intergenerational mobility by reducing the persistence of socioeconomic status across generations. However, this relationship remains complex, often constrained by enduring structural barriers. In contexts like rural Punjab, India, socioeconomic inequalities including class, caste, and educational background still limit access to quality higher education (Arifin, 2017; Narwana & Gill, 2022). These disparities underscore the need for targeted policies that address equity and support low-income students, as emphasized by Williams and Reppond, who advocate for removing institutional barriers to degree completion as a strategy to promote economic mobility

Furthermore, sustainability initiatives within higher education have been noted as essential in fostering not only academic achievement but also social inclusion and equity in developing countries (Chankseliani & McCowan, 2021; Molokova, 2021). As educational institutions embrace sustainable practices, they contribute to broader goals, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which aim to create equitable educational landscapes (Chankseliani & McCowan, 2021). This multidimensional approach to education underscores the need for interdisciplinary strategies to ensure that all individuals, regardless of their socioeconomic background, can access the benefits of higher education and navigate pathways toward improved social mobility. In conclusion, while higher education serves as a vehicle for vertical social mobility, the persistence of structural barriers calls for comprehensive reforms and targeted investments in equity-driven educational policies that can maximize opportunities for all individuals, particularly in developing countries where the stakes are highest.

The disparity in access to higher education in marginalized regions illustrates the convergence of geographic and economic inequalities that obstruct educational achievement and social equity. The notion of spatial justice, specifically the fair allocation of educational resources and opportunities among regions, is essential for assessing equitable access (Adegeye & Coetzee, 2019; Beach et al., 2018). (Beach et al., 2018) demonstrates that market-oriented policies exacerbate spatial inequality by constricting options for impoverished rural and urban people. Additional research highlights that a social justice framework in education must account for geographic location, socio-economic status, and institutional type as significant obstacles to participation (Boyadjieva et al., 2024; Goastellec & Välimaa, 2019). These inequalities are also reinforced by systemic factors at the individual, institutional and structural levels that form networks of vulnerability. (Mahmud & Akita, 2018) Disparities between urban and rural regions dramatically influence educational outcomes and opportunities, with metropolitan areas often exhibiting superior access to quality resources.

Higher education is regarded as a crucial avenue for vertical social mobility, particularly in developing nations, as it offers those from poorer socio-economic backgrounds the chance to enhance their social and economic standing. Nevertheless, the evidence indicates that this link is significantly affected by intricate mechanisms of inequality, especially in the geographical and economic realms. Research by (Beach et al., 2018) and (Adegeye & Coetzee, 2019) indicates that market-oriented educational strategies frequently intensify spatial disparities, neglecting access distribution in rural and impoverished regions. In this context, the notion of spatial justice is crucial for elucidating how geographical location influences access to education. This disparity is worsened by inadequate digital infrastructure, particularly during the transition to online education (Czerniewicz, 2018). Additional research underscores the necessity of a multidimensional approach, as access barriers are influenced not only by socio-economic status but also by the geographical location and nature of institutions, which intersect to create multiple layers of exclusion (Boyadjieva et al., 2024; Goastellec & Välimaa, 2019). (Mahmud & Akita, 2018) identified the disparity between the center and the regions as the primary reason of differences in educational outcomes. Conversely, education serves as a crucial mechanism for intergenerational mobility, as indicated by (Torche, 2014), who demonstrated that increasing access to education might diminish the continuity of socioeconomic status over generations. Consequently, for higher education to effectively serve as a vehicle for mobility, policy interventions must be implemented to tackle structural impediments and enhance inclusion in an equitable and sustainable fashion.

**Education as Capital: Human Capital and Social Justice Perspectives**

The intersection of education and economic opportunity is foundational in Human Capital Theory, primarily articulated by Gary Becker. This theory conceptualizes education as an investment that enhances an individual's productivity, thereby increasing income potential and enabling upward social mobility. It assumes that individuals make rational decisions about their educational pathways based on expected returns in the labor market (Molla & Pham, 2019), positioning education as a key driver of employability and economic growth. Within this framework, the quality of educational institutions becomes critical graduates from reputable institutions are more likely to secure stable employment and higher earnings. Nonetheless, Human Capital Theory has been critiqued for its overly individualistic and market-oriented assumptions. It often neglects the structural barriers that constrain educational access for disadvantaged populations, such as geographic isolation, poverty, or social marginalization (Francis et al., 2017; Molla & Pham, 2019). While Human Capital Theory offers valuable insights into the functional value of education, it must be complemented by perspectives that emphasize fair access and structural reform. Only then can education truly serve as both a tool of individual empowerment and a vehicle for inclusive socioeconomic development (Francis et al., 2017; Molla & Pham, 2019).

John Rawls’ Theory of Social Justice, particularly his notion of "justice as fairness," provides a critical lens for framing education as a fundamental human right. Rawls envisions a just society where equal liberty and the difference principle intersect to ensure fair distribution of opportunities, especially for marginalized groups. In this context, education becomes a mechanism for redistributive justice, emphasizing that fairness lies not only in outcomes but in the structures that enable access (Clark, 2014). Rawls rejects the notion that socioeconomic status should dictate educational opportunity, calling instead for systemic interventions that prioritize those least advantaged. Empirical evidence supports this view, showing that educational inequality directly impacts social mobility and individual agency (Preuss et al., 2022). As (Jopinus, 2024) argues, policies rooted in Rawlsian principles can foster inclusive educational systems that address the specific needs of underprivileged communities. The emphasis on just access structures reinforces the case for affirmative reforms that dismantle barriers to higher education. Moreover, Rawls’ framework supports efforts to strengthen institutional quality, positioning education as both a vehicle for personal advancement and a foundation for a more equitable society where opportunity is not predetermined by one’s social capital (Clark, 2014). Through this lens, education is not merely a service, but a cornerstone of social justice.

The role of higher education in promoting social mobility and community development can be best understood through the complementary lenses of Human Capital Theory and Social Justice Theory. From Gary Becker’s economic perspective, education is seen as an individual investment to enhance productivity, skills, and income potential. In this framework, individuals are viewed as rational actors who pursue education based on anticipated labor market returns. Consequently, the quality of educational institutions becomes a critical determinant of graduates’ preparedness for employment and upward mobility (BARKER & HOSKINS, 2021; Clark, 2014). However, this efficiency-oriented model often overlooks structural inequalities that prevent equitable access to quality education. Here, John Rawls’ "justice as fairness" offers a necessary corrective. Rawls emphasizes that justice lies not only in outcomes but also in the fairness of initial conditions, especially in ensuring that everyone has equal access to opportunity. His difference principle posits that social and economic inequalities are only justifiable if they benefit the least advantaged. In higher education, this implies that policies must address systemic barriers and provide affirmative interventions to ensure equitable access for marginalized communities (Jopinus, 2024). Thus, integrating Rawlsian ethics with Becker’s economic logic yields a more holistic understanding of education not only as a means of individual advancement, but also as a tool for promoting structural justice.

Integrating both perspectives, higher education emerges not only as a means to enhance individual productivity but also as a mechanism for redistributing social opportunities. Becker's framework highlights educational efficiency and outcomes, while Rawls stresses fair initial access and distributive justice. These views are complementary: without equitable access, educational investment remains a privilege of the advantaged; and without institutional quality, access alone holds little transformative value. In Indonesia, this integration is embodied in the Program Studi di Luar Kampus Utama (PSDKU) scheme. PSDKU enhances local human capital by bringing higher education services to marginalized regions, increasing their chances of economic and social mobility. Simultaneously, it operationalizes the principle of spatial justice by bridging longstanding geographical and structural barriers to access. Thus, PSDKU is not merely an administrative extension of higher education, but a concrete manifestation of an integrative approach that places efficiency and justice as dual pillars of transformative and inclusive educational development.

1. **METHOD**

This research centers on Surabaya State University Campus 5 Magetan (PSDKU) as the primary unit of analysis. PSDKU was selected because to its strategic significance in enhancing access to higher education and promoting social mobility within the local community. The primary informants included the Director of PSDKU, students, guardians of students, and neighborhood citizens engaged in the campus social ecosystem (Sofaer, 2002). Their selection was predicated on their direct impact on educational dynamics and alterations in socio-economic status inside the campus milieu (Gill, 2020). This research employs a qualitative methodology with a case study framework to examine PSDKU's role in social mobility comprehensively and contextually (Sofaer, 2002). This design facilitates a comprehensive knowledge of the relationships among institutions, students, and communities in influencing socioeconomic possibilities in marginalized regions (Elliott, 2018). This method also encompasses subjective narratives and societal significances intrinsic to educational processes at PSDKU.

Primary data were acquired by participant observation and semi-structured interviews with key informants (MOHAJAN, 2018). Observation was employed to document academic activities and social interactions within the campus and neighborhood settings, while interviews investigated the experiences and interpretations provided by informants regarding the role of PSDKU in social mobility. Secondary data, including government papers, activity reports, and supporting literature, were utilized for triangulation to enhance the validity of the findings. The amalgamation of these methodologies yielded a thorough comprehension of the role of educational institutions in facilitating social mobility. The data gathering methods were field observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis (Elliott, 2018). Observations documented routines that illustrated the connection between schooling and societal transformation, whilst interviews facilitated an adaptable examination of individual narratives. The examination of documents enhanced the data with contextual and administrative information that reinforced the field findings. Table 1 displays the grid of the research instrument.

**Table 1. Research Instrument Grid**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Aspects Explored** | **Indicators/Subtopics** | **Data Source/Informant** | **Methods** |
| Access to Education | Reasons for choosing PSDKU, ease of geographic access and costs | Students, guardians of students | Interview, observation |
| Perception of PSDKU | Institutional image, reputation, social legitimacy | Students, local community | Interview |
| Social and Economic Impact | Changes in social status, employment, income, social relations | Alumni, local residents | Interview |
| Campus-Community Interaction | Collaborative activities, campus social contributions | Director, lecturers, community | Observation, document |
| Quality of Institutions and Networks | Facilities, curriculum, partnerships, job opportunities | PSDKU Director, students | Interview, document study |
| Social Mobility | Indicators of improving the social and economic status of graduates | Students, alumni | Interview |
| Spatial Justice | Distribution of access, comparison between central and regional, affordability | Lecturers, community leaders | Interview, document |

Data analysis was performed inductively in three phases: data reduction (restatement), categorization and thematic elaboration (description), and interpretation that aligns the findings with the theoretical framework of social and educational mobility (interpretation) (Lisa et al., 1967). This phase facilitates a thorough comprehension of how PSDKU, as an educational entity, fosters opportunities and mitigates obstacles to social mobility for students and the local community. The analysis results are anticipated to yield novel insights into the strategic function of branch campuses in regional social and economic development.

**III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

**Accessibility of Higher Education**

Establishing branch campuses in underrepresented regions is a way to enhance access to quality higher education for communities encountering geographic and economic obstacles. Branch campuses offering programs and facilities comparable to the main school strive to guarantee parity in educational quality. The participation of branch campuses in enhancing local communities through training and community service demonstrates their role in local socio-economic development.

Access to higher education via PSDKU is crucial in promoting social mobility for individuals in remote regions. The parity of quality between PSDKU and the central campus enables local residents to access quality education without relocation, hence creating employment prospects and enhancing social standing. The institutional dedication, equitable teaching staff, and favorable student experiences demonstrate that PSDKU effectively enhances educational access and serves as a vehicle for social mobility for vulnerable populations. This aligns with the findings from student interviews.

*"I feel that PSDKU has really helped me to continue getting quality education without having to worry about being far from my family." (AJ/19/Student)*

PSDKU serves a vital function in decentralizing access to higher education from central authorities to regional entities. This aligns with the notion of spatial justice in higher education, wherein equitable geographical distribution of educational resources serves as a criterion for equality (Marginson, 2016). Branch campuses significantly enhance access to quality education, particularly for students in distant or underprivileged areas who may be unable to relocate or commute to the main campus. These campuses are frequently created to enhance accessibility to higher education for local communities by providing flexible schedules, smaller class sizes, and a more individualized learning environment, particularly advantageous for non-traditional and first-generation students (Funge et al., 2019). Branch campuses enhance the educational reputation, economic development, and scientific impact of a host region, exemplified by Malaysia and Dubai, where international branch campuses promote global research collaboration and elevate the academic stature of the area (Lane, 2011)(Stek & Park, 2024). Despite branch campuses typically fulfilling student expectations and quality assurance, issues persist, especially about funding, infrastructure, and maintaining uniform quality standards across sites (Coleman, 2003).

PSDKU plays an important role in addressing social inequality through equalizing access to higher education in underserved areas, especially by providing scholarships and mentoring for students from underprivileged families. This support has been proven to ease the burden of costs and increase educational participation, as expressed by leaders, lecturers, student guardians, and scholarship recipients. This is in accordance with the following interview results.

*"We provide special programs for students so that their participation in higher education increases and is not constrained by economic factors." (Hr/34/Lecturer)*

This aligns with the notion of broadening participation, a systematic initiative to enhance educational possibilities for historically marginalized groups in higher education, particularly individuals from low-income backgrounds (Marginson, 2016). Establishing branch campuses in underserved regions is a crucial method for equalizing access to higher education; yet, the challenges are intricate. Studies indicate that students from marginalized demographics, including those from rural or economically disadvantaged regions, encounter substantial obstacles such as insufficient digital infrastructure, restricted access to technology, and inadequate institutional support, thereby exacerbating the educational disparity relative to urban or central locales (Amjad et al., 2024)(Li et al., 2024). Branch campuses and community colleges frequently serve as the principal access points for marginalized students; nevertheless, these institutions are often underfunded and systematically stigmatized, resulting in inconsistent learning experiences and outcomes (McCambly et al., 2023). Furthermore, it is crucial to confront the systemic bias and discrimination that endures in branch campus settings, manifesting as racism, excessive policing, or linguistic and cultural disparities (Wolfram, 2023). Engagement in research and participation in community-based mentoring programs have demonstrated efficacy in narrowing graduation disparities and enhancing success rates for underrepresented populations (Livstrom et al., 2022) (Haeger et al., 2024).

PSDKU is a strategic initiative aimed at equitably expanding access to higher education by reducing geographical barriers and educational expenses. Branch campuses serve as a means of decentralizing higher education institutions, extending access to remote and underserved regions while offering a more economical option for the community to obtain quality educational services. Branch campuses enable students to obtain an education without relocating to large cities, which typically entail elevated living expenses and impose further economic burdens. This aligns with the subsequent interview findings.

*"With the presence of UNESA 5 campus in this area, I do not need to spend a lot of money for additional accommodation and transportation costs." (AF/53/Student Parents)*

Branch campuses facilitate access to higher education for students in remote or undeveloped regions without necessitating relocation, hence enhancing geographical accessibility to education (Kosmützky, 2018)(Funge et al., 2019)(Zeng et al., 2023). Branch campuses significantly reduce geographic barriers and educational expenses by broadening access to higher education in previously unreachable regions. By establishing campuses in new locations, universities can access students who are unable or unwilling to relocate to the main campus, alleviating the financial burden of living and transportation costs that frequently hinder prospective students from remote or underdeveloped regions (Funge et al., 2019). Furthermore, the establishment of branch campuses enhances local capacity, offers more equal educational opportunities, fosters regional economic growth, and bolsters the prestige of educational institutions both nationally and internationally (Lane, 2011)(Kleibert, 2021). Strategic interventions are required to sustain the aspiration and quality of education at branch campuses (Hickey & and Davies, 2024). Branch campuses effectively address geographical and financial limitations, although must be tempered with initiatives to uphold quality and sufficient institutional support.

PSDKU represents a strategic initiative aimed at addressing the challenges of discrimination, surveillance, and exclusion frequently seen within the campus milieu. These issues typically emerge in academic environments influenced by racialized practices and conventional gender norms that restrict the involvement of specific groups. In this perspective, PSDKU serves as a comprehensive initiative aimed at establishing equitable access to education for underserved populations (Dache-Gerbino & White, 2015)(Pryor, 2018). This interview demonstrates PSDKU as a means to enhance the involvement of excluded populations.

*"I am grateful to be able to get a scholarship and affordable tuition fees. This helps me from a poor family to be able to go to college." (AJ/19/Student)*

Branch campuses can significantly enhance participation of underprivileged groups in higher education. Research indicates that branch campuses frequently enroll a higher proportion of first-generation and talented students from marginalized backgrounds compared to main campuses, although generally exhibiting poorer graduation rates and diminished ethnic diversity (Jacquemin et al., 2019). Community colleges, including branch campuses, have historically offered open access to marginalized students; however, their advantages may be compromised by external influences such as racialization and surveillance, which can perpetuate segregation and the criminalization of students of color (Dache-Gerbino & White, 2015). Programs designed to foster empowerment, identity acknowledgment, and community consciousness can enhance underprivileged students' sense of belonging and involvement (Koren & Mottola, 2023)(Johns et al., 2021).

PSDKU strategically empowers local communities by implementing community service activities and skills training for students and citizens. These initiatives enhance the educational experience and bolster the community's socio-economic capability. This program is intended to significantly enhance social connections between the college and the community. Consequently, PSDKU serves as a conduit for access to quality education and the enhancement of social mobility in rural regions, simultaneously fostering social capital that underpins sustainable community empowerment. This aligns with the interview results presented below.

*"The campus often holds skills training for villagers to increase independence and develop regional potential." (Hr/34/Lecturer)*

These campuses frequently collaborate with local partners to meet particular community needs and foster regional development (Lane, 2011)(Crawford & McKenzie, 2023). Effective programs employ a multi-faceted methodology: awareness enhancement, capacity development, collaborative decision-making, and incorporation of indigenous knowledge. These initiatives focus on at-risk populations and highlight involvement, autonomy, and ownership (Dushkova & Ivlieva, 2024). Consequently, PSDKU may serve as a recommendation for enhancing local communication via diverse educational initiatives.

**Higher Education Connectivity and Economic Empowerment**

Access to higher education through PSDKU not only expands academic opportunities, but also provides significant economic impacts. The presence of campuses in the regions reduces the burden of living costs for students and their families, and creates local employment opportunities through operational activities and community service. Thus, PSDKU acts as a catalyst for regional economic development and improving community welfare.

The campus's development draws investors and entrepreneurs to establish enterprises in the vicinity, thereby generating new employment opportunities that bolster the local economy. Instructors noted the introduction of new enterprises, including food carts and boarding rooms, which had not previously existed in the area. The campus's skills training program enhances the local economic ecosystem by fostering community independence. The research and innovation generated by the campus enhance the region's competitiveness, while fostering economic and social advancement. Consequently, PSDKU serves a pivotal function not merely as an educational entity, but also as a catalyst for regional economic advancement. This aligns with the subsequent interview findings.

*"As the PSDKU campus develops, many investors and entrepreneurs are starting to be interested in opening businesses around the campus, creating new job opportunities and driving the local economy." (Sr/55/Director of PSDKU)*

The establishment of the PSDKU Campus has demonstrated a substantial economic influence on the adjacent region. The rise in academic endeavors and student enrollment has garnered the interest of investors and entrepreneurs who recognize the possibilities for local market expansion. This is seen in the proliferation of diverse new enterprises, including restaurants, boarding rooms, transportation services, and other ancillary facilities. This expansion enhances academic services, creates employment possibilities for local people, bolsters economic circulation, and underscores the importance of higher education as a catalyst for regional development. Nonetheless, this economic expansion also presents social and ecological difficulties, including escalating land prices, increasing economic disparity, and alterations in societal structure. Consequently, the interplay between the proliferation of educational institutions and local economic development requires deeper examination through a multidisciplinary framework that incorporates spatial, social, and sustainability dimensions.

PSDKU, being an educational institution situated in a marginalized region, fosters a novel economic ecology that promotes the development of small and micro enterprises in the vicinity of the campus. This discovery aligns with the research conducted by Trippl et al. (2015), which demonstrates that universities in non-metropolitan regions can serve as hubs of economic development via knowledge transfer, job creation, and community empowerment. The presence of PSDKU has catalyzed the establishment of new enterprises, including food stalls, boarding houses, and skills training programs, thereby demonstrating the tangible impact of higher education on fostering community-oriented economic growth. This aligns with the subsequent interview findings.

*"We hold various skills training development programs to empower local communities, so that the regional economy can grow independently." (An/35/Lecturer)*

PSDKU facilitates the creation of university startups and spin-offs, which serve as a key mechanism for transferring knowledge to the local economy and generating an entrepreneurial ecosystem. These activities help drive regional economic development and innovation by linking academic research to business opportunities (Belitski & Heron, 2017) (Fuster et al., 2019) (Hayter, 2016) (Hayter, 2016). Thus, PSDKU has an impact on the development of the local economic ecosystem around the campus.

PSDKU not only enhances access to higher education but also serves a strategic function in fostering competitiveness and innovation at the local level. Branch campuses have emerged as new growth centers that enhance regional capacity through the availability of trained people resources, practical research, and dynamic academic networks. Collaboration among universities, industry stakeholders, and local governments facilitates the optimization of regional potential for knowledge-based economic development. Entrepreneurial activities, the advancement of suitable technology, and the use of academic findings to address genuine community issues are significant contributions from campuses in fostering an innovative environment. Consequently, PSDKU serves not only as an educational entity but also as a catalyst for sustainable regional advancement.

*"The campus plays an important role in increasing the competitiveness of the region by producing innovative graduates who are ready to face the challenges of the times. This also spurs economic growth and creativity in our region." (Sr/55/Director of PSDKU)*

Branch campuses play a vital role in enhancing regional competitiveness and innovation by increasing research capacity, encouraging international collaboration, attracting talent, and supporting technological diversification. Their presence can help regions modernize, enhance their global reputation, and stimulate economic growth and entrepreneurship (Lane, 2011)( Stephen Wilkins & Huisman, 2010)(Stek & Park, 2024). Thus, the presence of PSDKU can enhance the competitiveness and innovation of the campus region. This certainly has a positive impact on the campus region.

**Community Group Capacitation through Higher Education**

The Higher Education Scheme Outside of Domicile (PSDKU) strategically enhances the capacity of vulnerable communities by broadening access to education and campus-based empowerment initiatives. Interview findings indicate that the existence of PSDKU fosters the establishment of socio-economic networks among students and citizens, simultaneously enhancing local capacity through training, business growth, and community service initiatives. The active engagement of students in the community facilitates the transfer of knowledge and technology. Consequently, PSDKU plays a pivotal role as a tool of higher education in fostering autonomy and sustainable development at the local level.

Higher education via PSDKU serves as a catalyst for local community capacity enhancement through organized skills training programs ranging from fundamental to advanced levels. This initiative enhances competitiveness and fosters economic independence among locals, evidenced by community engagement in entrepreneurship and food production training, so reinforcing local economic potential.

*"I took part in training from the campus on food product processing. Now I can make my own products and sell them." (Wn/47/citizen)*

Branch campuses focus on augmenting the capabilities, resources, and networks of local communities to empower them in fulfilling their own needs and ambitions (Liberato et al., 2011). University-community partnerships have proven effective in improving the evaluation capacity and practices of community organizations while also enhancing communication with stakeholders (Franco & Tracey, 2019) (Suiter et al., 2024). Research indicates that concentrating on priority sectors associated with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) can enhance communities' capacity to tackle sustainability concerns (Fallov, 2010) (Franco & Tracey, 2019).. Community capacity is developed through training, skills enhancement, resource mobilization, leadership, participatory decision-making, and network strengthening (Liberato et al., 2011a). Capacity building initiatives effectively enhance community resilience to mental health and trauma concerns, leading to improved access to resources, social support, and a sense of community togetherness, especially during crises such as the pandemic (Gilmer et al., 2021).

Community engagement in educational and service initiatives exemplifies the cooperative partnership between the school and the community. Interviews revealed that locals were actively engaged in debates and decision-making processes. The campus fosters the establishment of corporate groups and local economic activities, enhancing the university's social legitimacy and creating a collaborative environment for innovation. Consequently, PSDKU enhances community capacity in social, economic, and participative dimensions.

*"Residents are invited to discuss when the campus holds a social program or activity. So they are not just objects, but also take part." (Rh/52/Community Figure)*

Community involvement in education, particularly on branch campuses, enhances student achievement, institutional governance, and the overall quality of education. Modes of engagement encompass financial assistance, provision of infrastructure, scholarships, industrial practices, and involvement in planning and quality assurance. Participants encompass parents, community leaders, business representatives, academics, religious organizations, and local governments. Strategies to enhance participation encompass fostering trust, facilitating effective communication, and promoting active community engagement in campus initiatives. Despite the presence of hurdles such as economic limitations, inadequate education, and ineffective communication, robust participation can enhance collaborations and guarantee that educational programs align more closely with local need (Nurlaiva & Sumarsono, 2018)(Ali & Abdullah, 2019).

Citizen participation in education and service processes fosters collaborative relationships between universities and communities, aligning with the engaged university concept that places higher education as a contributor to social development (Benneworth et al., 2013). PSDKU fosters an inclusive learning ecosystem and enhances economic capability, social solidarity, and community resilience in distant locations through dialogues on social programs, corporate collaborations, and local innovations.

*"The campus often coordinates with the RT and RW if there are activities. They also listen to input from residents." (Rh/52/Community Leader)*

Collaboration between branch campuses and communities can substantially enhance student learning experiences and promote social change. Research indicates that. This collaboration can enhance networks, broaden resource accessibility, and promote the adoption of programs like open educational resources (OER) that facilitate student achievement and retention (Walton, 2020). Moreover, collaboration among universities and communities has demonstrated the capacity to ignite innovation, enhance interaction processes, and yield quantifiable social change within the local community (Nichols et al., 2015). The efficacy of cooperation is significantly affected by mutual commitment, leadership endorsement, and the establishment of frameworks and incentives that facilitate sustained collaboration (Kezar, 2005). Obstacles such disparities in corporate culture and geographical separation can be surmounted by establishing a unified vision, values, and mission, along with fostering robust cross-border teams (Kezar, 2005)(Bottorff et al., 2008). Collaboration can transpire across various domains, including curriculum development, academic services, and community-based initiatives involving different stakeholders both on and off campus (Stone, 2024). Consequently, engagement between branch campuses and communities enhances educational institutions and yields tangible advantages for the broader community.

1. **CONCLUSION**

This study shows that PSDKU in rural areas improves social mobility and local community skills. Access to quality higher education is a key socioeconomic intervention. A community-based model makes higher education an academic and social and economic empowerment instrument. Campus, student, and community collaboration shows how educational institutions alter local potential for regional progress. This study introduces a local higher education-based community capacity building paradigm. These findings improve university social function discussions, notably equitable access and community-oriented development. Collaboration between campuses and communities emphasizes the importance of social links in a participatory and sustainable learning ecosystem. This study can help politicians, educators, and local stakeholders design higher education-focused regional development initiatives. Campus-community vision alignment accelerates community empowerment and welfare. The study's limitations are its geographical scope (one PSDKU model) and intervention strategy (training and microeconomic empowerment). Changing community social structures has not been studied for long-term implications. Thus, more research is needed to adapt comparable models to different cultural, geographical, and educational policy contexts. This study shows that higher education can promote social and economic justice in poor areas.

**V. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The author sincerely expresses gratitude to the Rector of Universitas Negeri Surabaya for the continuous support and encouragement throughout the completion of this research. The author also acknowledges the institutional assistance provided by the Research and Community Service Institute (LPPM) of Universitas Negeri Surabaya, whose support made this research possible. This research was funded under the 2024 Domestic Collaboration Assignment scheme through the Research and Community Service Institute (LPPM) of Universitas Negeri Surabaya, under contract number 317/UN38/HK/PP/2024.

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