Muslim Education Review
Vol. 4 No. 2, 2025, 266-294
https://doi.org/10.56529/mer.v4i2.522

Examining the Roles of Education Civil Society Organizations in Supporting Tertiary Enrollment in Indonesia: A Case Study of the Suryanara Foundation

Lavinia DW Araminta[1,3], Wimba W Dinutanayo[2,3]
[1]School of Curriculum, Teaching and Inclusive Education, Monash University, Australia
[2]Centre of Educational Development, Poltekkes Kemenkes Tanjungkarang, Indonesia
[3]Suryanara Foundation, Indonesia
Corresponding E-mail: Lavinia.Araminta@monash.edu

Abstract

This study addresses the low tertiary educational attainment in Indonesia despite the critical role of higher education in societal development. The research aims to assess the contribution of an Indonesian Civil Society Organization (CSO), specifically the Suryanara Foundation, through its mentoring program, *Adik Asuh Suryanara*, on tertiary enrollment. The study utilizes a case study research design focusing on the organized mentoring program, examining both objective outcomes (tertiary enrollment achievements) and subjective outcomes (participant perceptions). Data collection involved document analysis and a survey conducted among program participants. Results indicate that a significant majority of scholarship awardees successfully enrolled in universities, primarily in state institutions and highly ranked universities across various disciplines. This achievement is coupled with the perceived personal development of the program participants in terms of the creation of a college-going culture, instrumental and communicative learning, role modeling by mentors, and a sense of community establishment among participants. The study suggests the essential roles of the Suryanara Foundation as an advocate for distributive justice, an agent of empowerment, and a collaborator in supporting tertiary enrollment in Indonesia. By evaluating the effectiveness of the CSO-led mentoring program, this research contributes to the CSO literature towards strengthening the roles of CSOs in enhancing tertiary education access and quality.

Keywords: *tertiary education, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), mentoring program, Indonesia, higher education, tertiary enrollment.*

Introduction

Tertiary education plays various vital roles that support development in low- and lower-middle-income nations. The provision of formal education beyond secondary school, which improves graduate skills and knowledge, the creation of new knowledge in research that advances social and technical innovation, and the development of strong partnerships with communities, businesses, and other stakeholders to address societal challenges are all important functions of tertiary education institutions and systems. Prioritizing tertiary education is critical for boosting innovation, accelerating economic growth, building human capital, advancing social change, improving competitiveness internationally, and fortifying political systems. Investing in post-secondary education can help nations create prosperous and sustainable growth pathways (Howell et al., 2022).

Despite the importance of the higher education sector, tertiary educational attainment in Indonesia remains low. Data from the Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education show that there were 4,004 Indonesian higher education institutions (3,820 private and 184 public) as of 2022 (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2024). However, only 16 percent of Indonesians aged 25 to 64 had completed higher education in 2017, which is much lower than the G20 and OECD averages of 38 percent and 44 percent, respectively. Young adults in Indonesia choose bachelor's degree programs over short-cycle tertiary credentials; 12 percent of those between the ages of 25 and 34 hold a bachelor's degree, compared to 4 percent who hold a short-cycle qualification. Only 1 percent of young individuals in Indonesia graduate with a master's degree, and less than 0.01 percent finish with a PhD (OECD, 2019). Recent official statistics indicate this figure has barely improved; as of 2023, tertiary attainment for this age group is still approximately 17 percent, confirming that rapid progress remains elusive, and persistent regional and urban-rural disparities continue to shape access (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2024; OECD, 2025).

Efforts to boost tertiary educational enrollment and attainment have been in place and carried out by a variety of governmental and non-governmental actors, including Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). CSOs serve as advocates for educational reforms, improve access to high-quality education, and improve educational outcomes in Indonesia. Among their many objectives are policy advocacy, infrastructure development, teacher preparation, curriculum development, and quality assurance monitoring. They work with different stakeholders, interact with the local community, and advance inclusive teaching methods. CSOs in education bring a substantial positive impact on the quality, accessibility, and inclusivity of education in Indonesia (USAID, 2018).

In other countries, the roles of CSOs related to education have been examined. For example, in the conflict-affected area of Cyprus, five selected CSOs were found to have cultivated citizen empowerment, enhanced children's and youth's voices, and established partnerships with state and other relevant actors through their respective peace-building education initiatives (Hajisoteriou, 2023). In Turkey, in the context of adult education activities, CSOs mainly played the role of collaboration, such as by conducting courses and providing trainers (Altunay & Bakır, 2022). In Delhi, India, three CSOs engaged in the running of Learning Centers, the preparation of textbooks, and the implementation of the Mid-Day Meal Scheme, respectively, were reported to help increase the number of children going to school and the degree of inclusivity in school programs (Mehtta, 2007). In the Czech Republic, Italy and Spain, a number of CSOs were partnering with schools focusing on students with varied linguistic backgrounds in the areas of project collaboration, language courses, teacher training, and event organizations, among others (Wolf et al., 2022). This body of documented evidence highlights the positive contributions of CSOs to the education sector at large, which are contingent on contextual factors in every society. It is, thus, important to focus on education CSOs operating in Indonesia to inspect their impact on the country's education sector.

In Indonesia itself, CSOs have been found to have impacted policy and governance, including advocating for legal reforms, monitoring the government's performance, and empowering marginalized communities (Rusfiana & Kurniasih, 2024). Their activism in an array of sectors has been documented. For example, CSOs focused on women's empowerment and gender equality have contributed to alliance-building to not only amplify voices of poor women (Sherlock, 2020) but also help build women's collective influence (Diprose, 2023). Indonesian CSOs concerned about climate justice issues, such as forest protection and indigenous rights, have been involved in advocacy, campaigns, legal work, training and publications (Luhtakallio et al., 2022). Islamic CSOs have also made their contributions, ranging from developing Islamic education in North Sumatra (Harahap et al., 2024) to countering radicalization in Bima (Sila & Fealy, 2022). However, none of these studies centers on tertiary education, leading to a dearth of research on education CSOs' roles in the Indonesian higher education sector. This empirical gap motivates this present study.

This research aims to evaluate the objective and subjective outcomes of an organized mentoring program delivered by an Indonesian CSO operating domestically named the Suryanara Foundation through its flagship program, *Adik Asuh Suryanara.* The objective outcomes refer to the achievements of the program participants in tertiary enrollment, while the subjective outcomes are derived from the participants' perceptions of the value of the program to their personal development other than academic progress. Discussions on these matters are hoped to mobilize actions by state and non-state actors toward strengthening the roles of CSOs in advancing tertiary enrollment in Indonesia.

Method

This case study research focuses on one specific mentoring program organized by a specific Indonesian CSO. Particularly, it is an intrinsic case

study that does not seek to generalize the findings (Hancock & Algozzine, 2016) to other mentoring programs or CSOs. The program being examined serves as the unit of analysis and was observed for a certain period (Gerring, 2006). The objective outcomes of the overall program were traced throughout the roll-out of five batches from July 2015 to July 2023, thus amounting to five years of data record. Meanwhile, the subjective outcomes were sampled from the last batch of the program running from July 2022 to July 2023.

Subject Characteristics

The Suryanara Foundation is a social education non-profit organization that is formally registered with the Ministry of Law and Human Rights of the Republic of Indonesia with the registration number AHU-0000066.AH.01.12.2018. The Indonesian education scholarship awardees from batch PK-33 of the *Lembaga Pengelola Dana Pendidikan* (LPDP) founded this charity. The foundation's earliest and most well-known initiative is the *Adik Asuh Suryanara* (AAS) program, which aims to support exceptional third-grade high school students and high school graduates across Indonesia who face financial obstacles in preparing themselves to enter university.

Through a series of online soft skill improvement seminars and a one-on-one mentoring system with mentors called *Kakak Asuh Suryanara*, who typically hold master's degrees, this program aims to prepare participants for acceptance into higher education, particularly state universities. In addition, this scholarship program offers funding for private tutoring services, as well as textbooks and internet bandwidth packages. The money is provided by individual donors who pledge to contribute a certain amount each month for a year.

The AAS program has been in operation for five batches. There were 15 grantees in the first batch in 2015–2016, 19 in the second batch in

2016–2017, 14 in the third batch in 2018–2019, 35 in the fourth batch in 2020–2021, and 23 in the fifth batch in 2022–2023. There is a total of 106 graduates of the program. Recipients originated from various provinces, particularly East Java (22.6%) and West Java (21.7%), followed by Central Java (8.5%), North Sumatra (6.6%), and Lampung and Bali (5.7% respectively). The rest of the participants came from fourteen other provinces across the country. In terms of gender, women made up 67.9 percent of the scholarship recipients across the program's five batches, while males made up 32.1 percent. Additionally, three grantees reported having disabilities, with different medical conditions. The characteristics of the awardees are shown in Table 1, which includes the number of grantees according to their batch, gender, regional distribution and whether they had disabilities.

Table 1. *Subject Characteristics*

	Number of Grantees (n = 106)	Percentage (%)
Scholarship Batch		
Batch 1 (2015–2016)	15	14.2
Batch 2 (2016–2017)	19	17.9
Batch 3 (2018–2019)	14	13.2
Batch 4 (2020–2021)	35	33.0
Batch 5 (2022–2023)	23	21.7
Gender		
Male	34	32.1
Female	72	67.9
Geographical	2	1.9
Distribution	7	6.6
Aceh	3	2.8
North Sumatera	2	1.9
West Sumatera	2	1.9

South Sumatera	1	0.9
Bengkulu	1	0.9
Riau	5	4.7
Riau Islands	3	2.8
Lampung	4	3.8
Banten	23	21.7
Jakarta	9	8.5
West Java	3	2.8
Central Java	24	22.6
Yogyakarta	5	4.7
East Java	4	3.8
Bali	1	0.9
West Nusa Tenggara	2	1.9
West Kalimantan	1	0.9
East Kalimantan	4	3.8
South Kalimantan		
South Sulawesi		
Grantee with Disabilities	3	0.03

It is noteworthy that even though awardees originated from many provinces, the majority came from Java and Sumatra. This reflects broader access disparities in Indonesian tertiary education, where students from less urban or less resourced islands are consistently under-represented (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2024; OECD, 2025). The Suryanara Foundation's participant pool thus unintentionally mirrors, rather than disrupts, the national urban-rural gap in university admission. Future program iterations should strengthen outreach and support to students in remote or eastern provinces.

Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected from documents archived and a survey designed by the Suryanara Foundation. The documents include both private and

public records. Private records are self-produced material by individuals that represent their beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors, whereas public records refer to documentation beyond the individuals' self-produced materials (Hancock & Algozzine, 2016). The private records include the program participants' application forms, which were useful for understanding the demographic spread of the participants. The public records include the foundation's letter of establishment and program reports (i.e., financials and achievements). These records were analyzed descriptively to report on the objective outcomes of the program.

As for the survey, this was part of the AAS program's evaluation by the participants from batch 5. The selection of only the most recent batch for in-depth subjective outcome analysis was made to ensure recency and consistency in program delivery and participant experience. Earlier batches were excluded due to differences in survey content or lack of complete data. The survey originally consisted of two unstructured questions—meaning that it provides room for respondents to develop their answers (Cowles & Nelson, 2019)—but only one was analyzed for this research. The question was designed to elicit the participants' views about the usefulness of the program's content in each mentoring session and distributed monthly via Google Forms.

The responses from the participants were then examined using inductive content analysis, starting from reading the text, doing open coding, organizing codes into sub-categories, to refining sub-categories into main categories (Sandström et al., 2015). The results of this analysis constitute the subjective outcomes of the program.

Ethical Considerations and Researcher Positionality

Participant responses were anonymized during the analysis and presentation of results. The research was also conducted in accordance with ethical guidelines for social research, including measures for

protecting vulnerable populations. Furthermore, the researchers are active members of the Suryanara Foundation. To minimize potential bias, objective program data were sourced from official Foundation records, and subjective outcomes were analyzed using anonymous survey data. Transparency in reporting and triangulation with publicly available documentation were used to reduce the influence of researcher affiliations on the findings.

Results and Discussion

Objective Outcomes of the Mentoring Program

Since tertiary enrollment was made the shared goal of the mentoring program, the objective outcomes of AAS were evaluated primarily from the enrollment achievements of awardees over the years, as can be seen in Table 2 below.

Table 2. *Tertiary Enrollment Achievements*

	Number of Grantees (n = 106)	Percentage (%)
Tertiary Education Acceptance		
State Universities	70	66.0
Private Universities	8	7.5
State Polytechnics	8	7.5
Private Polytechnics	0	0.0
Gap Year	18	17.0
Non-commissioned Officer Education	2	2.0

	Number of Grantees (n = 86)	Percentage (%)
Major		
Education	10	11.6
Engineering and Technology	15	17.4
Humanities	3	3.5
Medical and Health Sciences	12	14.0
Natural Sciences	18	20.9
Social Sciences	28	32.6

A vast majority of the scholarship awardees succeeded in being admitted into university (81%), while the rest had not been successful at the time of self-reporting and, thus, took a gap year (17%) or voluntarily underwent non-commissioned officer education (2%). Regarding the 17 percent of participants who took a gap year, there is currently no longitudinal follow-up to systematically document their subsequent educational pathways. While this constitutes a limitation of the present study, the Foundation has begun considering the establishment of an annual alumni tracer survey for continuous data improvement and to better understand long-term trajectories and challenges faced by past awardees.

Most awardees who managed to secure their spot in their chosen higher education institution went to different state universities (66%). There are a total of 34 institutions in various locations, with the majority being in Java Island (e.g., Institut Teknologi Bandung, Universitas Diponegoro, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, and Universitas Jember), followed by Sumatra Island (e.g., Universitas Andalas, Universitas Sumatera Utara and Universitas Lampung), Borneo

Island (e.g., Universitas Lambung Mangkurat), Sulawesi Island (e.g., *U*niversitas Hassanudin), Bali Island (e.g., Universitas Udayana) and Lombok Island (i.e., *U*niversitas Mataram). Some awardees were admitted into Islamic state universities, which are also dispersed across the country.

Those listed universities are categorized as highly ranked ones in the country (Webometrics, 2024), implying that AAS scholarship recipients possessed excellent academic competence. In fact, this fruitful outcome comes down to their initial aptitude; during the selection process, applicants were assessed based on not only socio-economic background but also academic achievements, which could ascertain their potential of gaining university admission despite their limited learning resources. Another possible contributing factor is their intrinsic motivation to pursue higher education, ensuring their determination during the long preparation process and continuous efforts invested along the way. Such motivation was also a selection criterion, as applicants were asked to write an essay explaining their reason for pursuing tertiary education.

Moreover, that finding is relatively proportional to the geographical distribution of awardees, who mostly came from Java and the Sumatra Islands. In other words, they might have selected an institution based on not only the offered study program and the university's reputation but also its proximity to their place of origin. Studying far from home would mean higher expenses for transportation and living costs, and all of them were not in a fortunate position to afford moving to another city or island without financial assistance.

State Polytechnics became the choice for a few awardees (7.5%). These institutions offer specialized vocational degrees, such as public sector accounting, and production and management of the plantation industry, which can aid them in transitioning into the professional world after graduating. For instance, STAN Polytechnic of State Finance, where four awardees studied, has a bonded service agreement with the government so that they will be appointed to be civil servants upon

graduation. Meanwhile, a few others (7.5%) went to private universities in various regions of the country. While these institutions would generally incur higher educational costs for students, the AAS awardees might have received financial help, but this information was not documented in the available record.

Regarding disciplinary areas, the largest portion of awardees studied social sciences (32.6%), such as law, international relations, and *sharia* banking. Natural sciences (20.9%), such as biology and chemistry, engineering and technology (17.4%), such as mechanical engineering and information systems, and medical and health sciences (14%), such as nutrition science, are the next favorite clusters of studies, followed by education (11.6%), such as primary school teacher education and counseling, and humanities (3.5%), such as *Minangkabau* literature and *hadith* science.

In the application form, AAS scholarship recipients had indicated their area of interest, but they might have changed their mind after attending the mentoring sessions in which speakers from various disciplinary backgrounds shared about their study program and current work. They were also paired with a mentor in a one-on-one arrangement to follow their progress and choice of study programs and universities. Additionally, the program administrators shared strategies to make college-going decisions. This whole process had contributed to their final choice.

Unfortunately, not all awardees gained admission into higher education institutions, and they chose to take a gap year (17%), with some doing freelance work while preparing for the next university entrance selection. It is important to note that the record of these achievements was not updated regularly, meaning that those who were not successful in their first attempt might try again in the following year and get admitted. Two awardees are exceptions, as they decided to take part in non-commissioned officer education and might have been employed as police

officers by now but, regrettably, information on this is unavailable, given the lack of follow-up communication between the Suryanara Foundation and the AAS program graduates.

The above findings can be explained using Bourdieu's cultural reproduction theory. Bourdieu emphasizes that education has been sustaining the reproduction of social classes by perpetuating and reinforcing social inequalities and power differentials (Stahl & Mu, 2022). The set of knowledge and skills gained from educational experiences is seen as cultural capital, yet this is not accessible to just any student. Students who come from more advantaged backgrounds, having been exposed to it for a longer duration by their families, easily acquire such cultural capital (Azaola, 2012).

In the Indonesian higher education context, social reproduction is marked mainly by financial barriers. First, unlike the mandated and subsidized twelve years of schooling (from elementary to senior high school), higher education institutions, even the public ones, charge tuition fees to students, and these are often beyond the financial capability of the student's parents. Senior high school students whose parents can barely make ends meet would not even dream of going to the university; as suggested by its name, 'tertiary' education remains to be a tertiary need for them. Second, entrance into reputable universities is high-stakes. A common practice among high school students is paying for tuition services in preparation for university entrance exams but, again, these services are often costly. Although receiving additional tutorials cannot guarantee university admission, students still access cultural capital, which certainly plays a crucial role in determining educational outcomes.

At this point, it would be safe to say that highly motivated students who come from less advantaged backgrounds can only rely on the existing educational resources if they wish to further their education beyond the secondary level. In our findings, the participants of the AAS program belong to the highly motivated but economically disadvantaged group,

and the financial barriers mentioned before did not seem to deter their determination. This finding reiterates scholars' critique against Bourdieu's deterministic point of view (Stahl & Mu, 2022). In fact, the AAS program which gave both material and immaterial support, or other CSOs which have similar interventions and alternative educational systems, may disrupt the detrimental social reproduction via higher education (Azaola, 2012). However, despite the fact that students from less advantaged backgrounds are possible to be included in the higher education sector after interventions, social reproduction processes still take place within deprived communities (Azaola, 2012). As demonstrated in Table 2, even participants from lower socio-economic backgrounds accessed leading universities when provided structured support, highlighting the concentration of resources only in certain regions in the country. Other than that, the rest of the participants who did not get into the university chose to take a gap year, which is a more affordable choice than going to a private university.

Subjective Outcomes of the Mentoring Program

The success of a mentoring program cannot be evaluated only in quantitative measures, as it could lead to bias for suggesting that the program is the sole contributing factor to tertiary enrollment. Besides, treating tertiary enrollment as the penultimate indicator of success could be damaging to participants who did not manage to be admitted into the university, so taking a product-oriented approach is counter-productive. Thus, subjective outcomes of the mentoring program also need to be studied from the perspective of participants themselves in relation to the values they obtained from the mentoring sessions. Evaluating these can uncover processes contributing to the objective outcomes of the program.

Based on the participants' responses to the mentoring session evaluation survey, textual data were coded, and the generated codes were then categorized into four major themes: (i) creation of college-going

culture; (ii) instrumental and communicative learning; (iii) role modeling by mentors; and, (iv) sense of community establishment among participants.

i. Creation of a college-going culture

In response to sessions on the introduction of several study programs within two major disciplinary clusters, namely science, and technology and health sciences, the participants stated how their horizons expanded due to exposure to disciplinary areas outside their own interests. Finding the insights helpful, one participant shared bits of such information with non-awardee peers at his school.

> *Although I have no interest in health sciences, this session was informative. I could even share the information with my school friends who have an interest in public health. I felt good when my friends were very thankful for the mentoring materials I shared to them* (Participant A)

Moreover, the participants reported gaining insights on the technical details of the joint entrance selection of state universities (*Ujian Tulis Berbasis Komputer—Seleksi Nasional Berdasarkan Tes/UTBK-SNBT*) and strategies to choose the right study program and tertiary institution, enabling the participants to make well-informed decisions.

The AAS program as a whole is, indeed, meant to create a college-going culture, defined as an educational ecosystem that promotes "students' college aspirations, plans, and preparation" and divided into two categories of recommendation, namely academic preparation and college knowledge (i.e., non-academic aspects of college-going) (Knight & Duncheon, 2020, p. 316). While the provision of learning facilities

provided by the Suryanara Foundation, including paid access to college tutoring services, textbooks and monthly internet data, caters to academic preparation, the mentoring sessions provide college knowledge to the participants, serving as a counselling network regarding college and career information dissemination (Knight & Duncheon, 2020) in addition to teachers and school friends.

It is important to note that the vast majority of participants have parents who never attended higher education. Although parental influence on low-income, first-generation students' journey into college is significant in providing motivational support related to autonomy in college planning and a sense of competence, parents are not equipped with the procedural knowledge of admission processes (Mitchall & Jaeger, 2018), let alone the cultural norms of higher education (Knight & Duncheon, 2020).

ii. Instrumental and communicative learning

Other than academic progress, the participants claimed acquiring new insights, skills and knowledge throughout the mentoring program; for instance, logical and critical thinking skills, an understanding of sources of academic stress and how to manage academic stress, time management skills, effective study habits, and communication skills. One participant stated that such insights would not be taught at school, suggesting that the materials presented during the sessions were complementary to the formal education they received. The insights they gained led to self-reflection, making them feel more composed amidst an immense academic load. The participants also pointed to a change in mindset and found determination to change their old habits.

> *I am honestly an introverted person, so it's difficult for me to join organizations. In the end, I realized that being a closed-minded person doesn't bring anything good to me and even hampers me from flourishing. Thankfully this mentoring session opened my eyes that joining communities expands social relations and that pursuing achievement is important. From now on I will be more active in attending seminars, volunteering, joining LPI, practicing public speaking skills, and being open-minded.* (Participant B)

The participants' reflective accounts can be explained using Mezirow's transformative learning theory, particularly the domains of instrumental learning, which deals with proficiencies, knowledge, understandings, and capability to anticipate forthcoming consequences, and communicative learning, which includes the negotiation of values, beliefs, and normative expectations of the participants themselves, others, and society (Quinn & Sinclair, 2016). In the instrumental learning domain, the participants understood not only college knowledge but also the skills necessary to navigate the complex higher education environment so that they were better prepared before becoming university students. In the communicative learning domain, the interaction between the participants and mentors and between themselves mediated the exchange of perspectives and ideas related to study and career.

iii. Role modeling by mentors

The participants frequently expressed admiration towards the mentors who were invited as speakers. The sharing of personal academic and professional experiences by mentors often inspired and motivated them to study hard to pursue their dreams. The participants also commented on the two-way interaction between them and the mentors,

allowing them to get to know the mentors as professionals in their respective fields and to consult about their own study-related issues.

> *I was speechless during this session. All the mentors are really amazing. As they were talking, I couldn't help myself smiling and being in awe, wondering how could there be smart and lucky people like them. I hope that one day I could have achievements like them.* (Participant C)

In the AAS program, mentors indirectly acted as role models for the participants. Morgenroth et al. (2015) redefine role models according to three interrelated functions; namely behavioral models (i.e., demonstrating how to achieve a goal), representations of the possible (i.e., showing that a goal is possible to achieve), and inspirations (i.e., driving others to want to achieve a goal).

As role models, AAS mentors share technical guidance, such as practical study tips and strategies for choosing a study program and a tertiary institution, so that the participants, who reported feeling overwhelmed, know what to do next. As representations of the possible, with their educational qualifications, mentors present proven records that despite financial difficulties, they managed to get into university, graduate, and work professionally. Since some mentors come from underprivileged social and financial situations, the participants could relate to their past situation and become convinced that attaining higher education is not exclusive to more privileged high school students. Mentors and program administrators also supplied participants with scholarship information, thus alleviating anxieties around tuition fees. This leads mentors to be the sources of inspiration who advocate for the importance of tertiary education by telling personal stories about where

their degree has taken them in life, for example, a professional career and a scholarship to study further overseas.

iv. Sense of community establishment among participants

The interaction among participants during the mentoring sessions on video conferencing platforms and in their chat groups bolstered a sense of community among them. During the session on critical thinking skills, they had the opportunity to work in groups to discuss a case study, and they reported positive experiences of having stimulating discussions with their team members. They also shared their planning strategies for enrolling in tertiary institution, leading to the establishment of a support system. One of the participants admitted feeling part of a community during a gap year.

> *I was so happy to belong to a group after leaving high school a year ago. The discussion was lively and even felt like an offline discussion. As my friends were welcoming, I found it easy and felt confident to participate in the discussion.* (Participant B)

The participants' accounts related to a sense of community reflect the domains of Membership and Self in the ecological model of a sense of community as a psychological construct (Jason et al., 2015). In the Membership domain, members are seen to support each other towards achieving the common goals they are aiming for, whereas the Self domain pertains to how meaningful the group is to each of the participants (Jason et al., 2015). What makes this emergent sense of community unique in the case of AAS participants is that they never met in person, came from different regions of the country; however their shared goal of pursuing higher education enabled the development of their sense of community.

Furthermore, interacting with other participants could boost their overall mood, as articulated by Participant E:

> *I was feeling down seeing my school friends achieving many things, but interacting with other awardees who are similarly ambitious as me, even only on Zoom, has restored the high spirit in me.*

One study on Australian rural men's subjective well-being suggests that a sense of community has a beneficial effect on well-being by decreasing the damaging consequences of stress (Kutek et al., 2011), and this might explain the perceived positive impact of being part of the AAS awardees' community amidst the academic stress that the participants were going through.

Roles of the Suryanara Foundation in Advancing Tertiary Enrollment in Indonesia

As a domestic education CSO in Indonesia, the Suryanara Foundation through its AAS program has played three crucial roles in supporting tertiary enrollment in the country.

The first role is an advocate for distributive justice in the higher education sector. In this case, distributive justice attends to membership qualification distribution, with questions, such as which students are admitted to state universities and how competitive admission into state universities is (Yun et al., 2017). For students from low socio-economic backgrounds, public universities would arguably be their top choice due to higher quality of education, cheaper tuition fees, and availability of scholarships. For example, the Bidikmisi scholarship provided by the Indonesian government for financially struggling university students is

disbursed to qualified public universities and selected private universities (Mulyaningsih et al., 2022).

Nevertheless, ensuring admission into Indonesian public universities is relatively harder than admission to private universities as the selection process is very competitive. While any eligible high school students and leavers are allowed to take the *UTBK-SNBT,* the playing field is inherently inequitable and potentially marginalizing students from low socio-economic backgrounds in terms of resources. More financially privileged students can afford private tutoring services in addition to formal education to help them better prepare for the entrance test, but financially disadvantaged students have to rely only on existing resources available to them. The Suryanara Foundation has been trying to level the playing field so that financially disadvantaged students can obtain additional educational resources, such as tutoring and textbooks. The provision of resources does not guarantee tertiary admission, but it ensures that during the preparation stage alone, student participants have the same opportunities to study.

The second role of the Suryanara Foundation is as an agent of empowerment, similar to the finding in Hajisoteriou (2023). College opportunities and outcomes can be influenced by school climate, and to promote college-going culture, a supportive school climate, including teachers, staff and peers, is needed (Knight & Duncheon, 2020). Unfortunately, not all schools can provide the needed college-going support, and this can hamper students from low socio-economic backgrounds whose parents are unaware of college-going processes (Mitchall & Jaeger, 2018) and, thus, they can only depend on the school ecosystem to help them prepare. Without sufficient college support, students can feel helpless, especially during those stressful times. The Suryanara Foundation intends to make students feel empowered by creating a complementary support system consisting of program administrators, mentors and peers.

Last but not least, the Suryanara Foundation plays a collaboration function, as found in Altunay and Bakır (2022). In its activism, the foundation does not partner with the government, unlike Mehtta (2007); instead, the collaboration is done with the civic society. Donors and mentors are reached out to mainly within the personal network of the members of the foundation and also through social media engagement. This civic-only arrangement consequently limits the amount of funds received and leads to an unreliable source of funds, compared to CSOs receiving grants from the government or donations from international funding bodies. The financial capacity of donors also varies across individuals, and their commitment is not always strong, with some pulling out in the middle of the process.

Thus, ensuring a reliable source of funds and expanding networks with other CSOs and education professionals would be the next steps to be taken. As noted by Fernandes (2022), collaboration between non-governmental organizations and the government is deemed necessary to ensure the sustainability of civil society initiatives, but the ability to collaborate efficiently will depend on the Suryanara Foundation's transformation towards greater institutionalized organizational capacity, especially in terms of regeneration and strategic planning (Fernandes, 2022), which remain to be its internal problems.

All the three roles above are directed at greater inclusivity (Mehtta, 2007) for Indonesian high school students and graduates towards tertiary enrollment. This is ensured even in the program's selection process, in which students from outside of Java Island and who have disabilities are given higher weight in their scores. The online delivery of the mentoring sessions is not ideal for participants living in areas where internet connection is weak, but this has enabled the dissemination of college knowledge to students in various regions in the country, instead of concentrating information on certain regions. Although there is room for improvement for the program's design and implementation, the AAS program is hoped to have contributed to the individual lives of students by

stimulating and transforming their perspectives about higher education and their future.

Conclusion

This study has attempted to evaluate the objective and subjective outcomes of an organized mentoring program by an Indonesian education CSO, filling the evidence gap in the CSO literature. The result points to successful tertiary enrolment as the objective outcome, which was coupled with the subjective outcomes of the program, including the creation of college-going culture, transformative learning, role modeling, and sense of community establishment. While the CSO under investigation does not aim to challenge the status quo through policy advocacy, it plays its part in advancing tertiary enrollment in Indonesia by promoting distributive justice, empowering students, and collaborating with other members of the society, hence making the higher education sector more inclusive.

Given the structural inequalities in the country, the vision of tertiary education for all would be challenging to realize without the participation of education CSOs. It is important for the government to see them as collaborators that provide outreach to social policy beneficiaries that are still out of the government's reach, instead of as opposition. Therefore, the path to be sought in the future is the opening of more opportunities for capacity building and collaboration between domestic education CSOs, especially those which are grappling with sustaining their organization, and relevant stakeholders in the education ecosystem, including the Indonesian government, international education CSOs, funding bodies, and even the private sector. Empowered CSOs empower the community, and it is never too late to start embracing them in the policy-making processes.

Despite the insights offered, this study poses limitations. First, the current reliance on open-ended survey data, while illustrative, is recognized as a methodological limitation, as there is a possibility of bias due to the use of self-reported surveys. Participants might have decided to only speak about the perceived benefits of the program and omit any criticisms they had. In addition, we, the researchers, were active members of the organization being investigated and might have implicit assumptions about the program's design and performance. This could have influenced how we collected, interpreted and presented the data. Second, as mentioned in the Results and Discussion section, the researchers did not conduct a follow-up survey with participants after they finished the program, so data were limited to their perceptions about the mentoring sessions, instead of the overall program. Hence, future research examining educational interventions by CSOs should employ other types of data collection instruments, such as qualitative interviews, focus group discussions, and diaries, especially for post-graduation tracking, to allow for triangulation. Future studies should also adopt a more longitudinal study with a number of time points, such as during participant orientation, in the middle of the program, at the conclusion of the program, and several months after the program completion. The addition of such instruments is strongly recommended for future research or program evaluations to substantially enrich the understanding of subjective and long-term program impact.

Furthermore, while this intrinsic case study does not allow for broad generalization, the Suryanara Foundation's holistic mentoring for tertiary enrollment can be productively contrasted with the specialized approaches of other Indonesian CSOs, such as the Surya Institute's focus on science Olympiads and Rumah Pintar Foundation's commitment to informal and digital literacy education. These diverse organizational models illustrate the varied pathways through which CSOs support educational access in Indonesia. To determine which strategies most effectively address educational equity, more coordinated comparative

research, for example, by combining multiple, in-depth case studies and subsequent meta-analyses, will be essential. Such scholarship, especially when conducted collaboratively by CSOs and higher education experts, would provide actionable guidance for both policy and practice, ultimately strengthening state and non-state partnerships in the pursuit of inclusive tertiary education.

References

Altunay, E., & Bakır, D. (2022). The roles of Adult Education Centres and Civil Society Organisations in adult education in Turkey. *Studies in the Education of Adults*, *54*(1), 61–83. https://doi.org/10.1080/02660830.2021.2009685

Azaola, M. C. (2012). Revisiting Bourdieu: Alternative educational systems in the light of the theory of social and cultural reproduction. *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, *22*(2), 81–95. https://doi.org/10.1080/09620214.2012.700187

Badan Pusat Statistik. (2024). *Statistik Indonesia 2024.* Volume 52. Badan Pusat Statistik.

Cowles, E. L., & Nelson, E. (2019). *An introduction to survey research. Volume II, Carrying out the survey* (2nd ed.). Business Expert Press.

Diprose, R. (2023). Brokerage, power and gender equity: How empowerment-focused civil society organisations bolster women's influence in rural Indonesia. *Journal of International Development*, *35*(3), 401–425. https://doi.org/10.1002/jid.3770

Fernandes, A. (2022). NGOs and democratization in Indonesia: From co-optation to collaboration. In *Society and Democracy in South Korea and Indonesia* (pp. 81–105). Springer International Publishing AG. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-06267-4_5

Gerring, J. (2006). *Case study research: Principles and practices*. (1st ed.). Cambridge University Press.

Hajisoteriou, C. (2023). CSOs working for peace through education in conflict-affected areas: The case of Cyprus. *British Educational Research Journal*, *49*(6), 1234–1253. https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3894

Hancock, D. R., & Algozzine, R. (2016). *Doing case study research: A practical guide for beginning researchers.* (3rd ed.). Teachers College Press.

Harahap, N., Warjio, Ginting, J. S., Abdullah, Z., & Raihan, H. M. (2024). Development strategy of Islamic civil society organization (cso) in Indonesia: A case of Al Jamiyatul Al Wasliyah. *Journal of Ecohumanism, 3*(7), 2309–2317. https://doi.org/10.62754/joe.v3i7.4381

Howell, C., Unterhalter, E., & Oketch, M. (2022). *The role of tertiary education in development: A rigorous review of the evidence*. British Council. https://doi.org/10.57884/T43D-7T10

Jason, L. A., Stevens, E., & Ram, D. (2015). Development of a three-factor psychological sense of community scale. *Journal of Community Psychology*, *43*(8), 973–985. https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.21726

Knight, D. S., & Duncheon, J. C. (2020). Broadening conceptions of a 'college-going culture': The role of high school climate factors in college enrollment and persistence. *Policy Futures in Education*, *18*(2), 314–340. https://doi.org/10.1177/1478210319860987

Kutek, S. M., Turnbull, D., & Fairweather-Schmidt, A. K. (2011). Rural men's subjective well-being and the role of social support and sense of community: Evidence for the potential benefit of enhancing informal networks. *The Australian Journal of Rural Health*, *19*(1), 20–26. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1440-1584.2010.01172.x

Luhtakallio, E., Ylä-Anttila, T., & Lounela, A. (2022). How do civil society organizations influence climate change politics? Evidence from India, Indonesia, and Finland. *Journal of Civil Society*, *18*(4), 410–432. https://doi.org/10.1080/17448689.2022.2164026

Mehtta, A. (2007). 'Good effort, but must try harder': Civil Society Organisations and education in Delhi. *IDS Bulletin (Brighton. 1984)*, *38*(6), 88–95. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1759-5436.2007.tb00423.x

Mitchall, A. M., & Jaeger, A. J. (2018). Parental influences on low-income, first-generation students' motivation on the path to college. *The Journal of Higher Education (Columbus)*, *89*(4), 582–609. https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2018.1437664

Morgenroth, T., Ryan, M. K., & Peters, K. (2015). The motivational theory of role modeling: How role models influence role aspirants' goals. *Review of General Psychology*, *19*(4), 465–483. https://doi.org/10.1037/gpr0000059

Mulyaningsih, T., Dong, S., Miranti, R., Daly, A., & Purwaningsih, Y. (2022). Targeted scholarship for higher education and academic performance: Evidence from Indonesia. *International Journal of Educational Development*, *88*, 102510-. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2021.102510

OECD (2019), *Education at a glance 2019: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris. https://doi.org/10.1787/f8d7880d-en

OECD (2025), *Education at a glance 2025: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris. https://doi.org/10.1787/1c0d9c79-en

Quinn, L. J., & Sinclair, A. J. (2016). Undressing transformative learning: The roles of instrumental and communicative learning in the shift to clothing sustainability. *Adult Education Quarterly*, *66*(3), 199–218. https://doi.org/10.1177/0741713616640881

Rusfiana, Y., & Kurniasih, D. (2024). The role of Civil Society Organizations in promoting social and political change in Indonesia. *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies, 11*(3), 187-207. https://doi.org/10.29333/ejecs/2154

Sandström, B., Willman, A., Svensson, B., & Borglin, G. (2015). Perceptions of national guidelines and their (non) implementation in mental healthcare: A deductive and inductive content analysis. *Implementation Science: IS*, *10*(1), 43–43. https://doi.org/10.1186/s13012-015-0234-0

Sherlock, S. (2020). Alliances of instrumental advantage: Supporting women's agency in civil society organisations in Indonesia. *Politics and Governance*, *8*(4), 147–156. https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v8i4.3347

Sila, M. A., & Fealy, G. (2022). Counterterrorism, civil society organisations and peacebuilding: The role of non-state actors in deradicalisation in Bima, Indonesia. *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology, 23*(1), 97–117. https://doi.org/10.1080/14442213.2022.2041076

Stahl, G., & Mu, G.M. (2022). Pierre Bourdieu: Revisiting reproduction, cultural capital, and symbolic violence in education. *In: Geier, B.A.* (Eds) *The Palgrave Handbook of Educational Thinkers. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham*. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-81037-5_128-1

USAID. (2018). *Assessment report: Civil Society Organizations in Indonesia.* United States Agency for International Development.

Webometrics. (2024). *Ranking web of universities.* https://www.webometrics.info/en/Asia/Indonesia%20

Wolf, J., Casado-Muñoz, R., & Pedone, F. (2022). Partnership of schools and civil society organisations to support education of students of varied linguistic backgrounds—The situation in the Czech Republic, Italy and Spain. *European Journal of Education*, *57*(4), 674–691. https://doi.org/10.1111/ejed.12524

Yun, L., Jingxun, Z., & Rongguang, Z. (2017). An examination of distributive and relational justice in the issue of education fairness for urban migrant workers' children. *Chinese Education and Society*, *50*(4), 368–392. https://doi.org/10.1080/10611932.2017.1382135