



Negotiating Identity and Learning Spaces among Marginalized Urban Youth in Informal Education Settings

Fahad Achmad Sadat^{1*}, Aminuddin², Bakri³

¹STIT Buntet Pesantren Cirebon, Indonesia

²Universitas Pejuang Republik Indonesia

³STKIP Darul Qalam Tangerang, Indonesia

Corresponding Author: Fahad Achmad Sadat,

fahad@stit-buntetpesantren.ac.id

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords: Identity, Learning Spaces, Marginalized Youth, Informal Education, Urban.

Received : 23, August

Revised : 6, September

Accepted : 8, October

©2025 Sadat, Aminuddin, Bakri: This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).



ABSTRACT

This study analyzes how marginalized urban adolescents negotiate their identities through participation in informal learning spaces and how social interaction dynamics within these spaces influence learning and self-recognition. Using a qualitative case study approach, the research was conducted in an informal education community in Cirebon City involving 20 informants, including adolescents, community facilitators, and non-formal educators. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observations, and community document analysis, then examined using thematic analysis. The findings reveal that informal learning spaces act as arenas for identity negotiation, enabling adolescents to build self-confidence, expand social networks, and develop life-relevant skills. Moreover, informal education helps reduce social stigma by providing a safe environment for self-expression and active participation. In conclusion, the study offers theoretical insights into the relationship between identity and learning spaces and provides practical implications for designing informal education programs that are inclusive, transformative, and empower marginalized urban youth.

INTRODUCTION

Informal education has developed significantly as an important alternative in addressing the inequality of access to formal education in various Indonesian middle cities. In cities like Cirebon, the phenomenon of urbanization and social disparities creates economically and institutionally marginalized groups of adolescents. In this context, non-formal learning spaces are an important forum for the formation of personal identity as well as strengthening social capacity. International studies confirm that informal spaces have the potential to build learning identities and reduce inequalities for marginalized learners (Çolakoğlu et al., 2023). In Indonesia, research shows that non-formal education is able to contribute to the social and economic empowerment of marginalized communities, although its implementation still faces limitations in scope and sustainability (Laila & Salahudin, 2022). However, research that focuses on the context of medium-sized cities such as Cirebon is still relatively rare.

Local literature enriches this discourse by highlighting the role of community education. For example, research (Maemonah et al., 2024) shows that the Smart House-based community model is able to contribute to the reduction of juvenile delinquency in Papua, even though the orientation is more on moral and social aspects than identity. Meanwhile, a study (Haryoni & Hermawati, 2023) on non-formal education for street children in Yogyakarta shows important benefits of community intervention, but has not explored in depth the mechanisms of identity negotiation in it. On the other hand, research (Assafary & Husrah, 2020) reveals that non-formal institutions such as mosque youth groups have an effect on adolescent morale, but there is still a lack of study in examining the complex relationship between informal learning spaces and identity formation.

The discourse on the identity of urban adolescents is also relevant to strengthen the perspective of this research. (Margono, 2025) emphasizes the existence of hybrid identities among marginalized village youth, which describes the interaction between local and political identities. Global studies show a similar pattern, where young people in non-formal education spaces often construct new social identities through interaction and active participation (Saar & Ráis, 2022; Wood et al., 2021). The phenomenon of social isolation experienced by marginalized adolescents in various regions shows the need for alternative educational spaces that are more inclusive (Lea, 2020).

Thus, there is a fairly clear research gap. Previous studies, both at the national and global levels, have mostly only highlighted informal education or partial identity. There has not been much research that has comprehensively examined how marginalized adolescents negotiate their identities through engagement in informal learning spaces influenced by urban contexts and social marginalization. Therefore, this study seeks to answer this gap with a field study in Cirebon as a medium city with complex social dynamics.

This research explicitly aims to explore how marginalized adolescents in Cirebon negotiate their identities through involvement in informal learning spaces, as well as how social interactions in these spaces affect the learning

process and self-recognition as social actors. The research focus is directed to build a conceptual framework that connects identity processes, the dynamics of informal learning spaces, and urban marginalization conditions more deeply.

Theoretically, this study will enrich the study of non-formal education by explicitly including the identity dimensions of urban adolescents, building a model that integrates social identity theory, alternative education, and urban marginalization. Practically, the results of this study are expected to be a reference for informal education program designers, non-governmental organizations, and policymakers to develop interventions that are more inclusive, transformative, and responsive to the needs of marginalized adolescents.

By combining theoretical and practical perspectives, this research contributes to the development of alternative education in urban Indonesia. This research also opens up space for marginalized adolescents to actualize their positive identities in the context of non-formal education, while addressing the challenges of social and cultural inequality in urban societies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Informal Education as an Alternative Space for Identity Strengthening

Informal education has been internationally recognized as a space that fosters the development of individual identity through real experiences outside the formal system. (Çolakoğlu et al., 2023) assert that nonformal learning spaces, such as creative communities, play an important role in shaping learning identities for marginalized participants. This process allows adolescents to see themselves as learners even outside the institutional framework. Similar findings in Indonesia were also shown by (Gumelar et al., 2024), who found that non-formal education is effective in overcoming social media addiction and improving adolescents' adaptability through community-based programs.

Identity Negotiation in Urban Marginal Areas

Adolescent identity is often formed through social dynamics in informal settings. Research in Malaysia by (Mohd Zaharim et al., 2020) reveals that adolescents living in marginalized conditions interpret their situation as an opportunity to determine the direction of personal identity. This concept of identity negotiation is in line with the theory of Third Space, which explains how marginalized individuals build hybrid identities through interactions in transitional spaces (Bhabha, 2024). In the context of Cirebon, this approach is relevant to understand how adolescents use informal spaces as a multi-layered and flexible identity formation arena.

Adaptation of Learning Spaces in Marginalized Urban Environments

Ethnographic research on education in Makassar by (Djufri, 2025) shows how local actors, both teachers and students, take the initiative to create learning spaces outside the boundaries of formal schools, such as houses of worship or street corners. This reflects the concept of lived space and spatial justice, which is

a space created as a form of resistance to structural limitations. A similar approach can be found in Cirebon, where informal learning spaces are transformed into an arena for identity negotiation as well as alternative learning locations.

Marginalization, Identity, and Structural Roles

The identities of marginalized adolescents are not only formed in informal spaces, but also through their structural positions in society. Standpoint Theory emphasizes that marginalized groups have a unique perspective in understanding the social world (Harding, 2024). Research on undocumented immigrant learners in the United States by (Gonzales, 2020) shows how identity is formed through the process of ethnic mixing and educational adaptation strategies. These findings are in line with the Cirebon context, where marginalized adolescents negotiate their identities not only because of spatial conditions, but also because of the social and cultural positions they occupy.

Identity and Behavior Models in Social Contexts

Identity Control Theory provides an important framework for understanding how individuals adjust their identities based on social reactions from their environment. (Burke, 2024) explains that when a person's identity does not gain social recognition, they tend to re-reflect or adjust that identity to gain acceptance. This model is particularly relevant in informal learning spaces, where recognition from peers plays a key role in the formation of stable and adaptive adolescent identities.

METHODOLOGY

Types and Approaches to Research

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design. This approach was chosen because it is appropriate to explore the subjective experiences of marginalized adolescents in negotiating their identities through engagement in informal learning spaces. Case studies allow researchers to analyze phenomena in depth in complex real-world contexts, especially related to social, cultural, and educational dynamics in urban communities (Creswell & Poth, 2021). This approach is also in line with research objectives that focus on processes and meanings, not on quantitative measurements alone (Yazan, 2022).

Research Population

The research population is urban marginalized adolescents in Cirebon City who are involved in informal educational activities, either through learning communities, social organizations, and community-based programs. The sampling technique used purposive sampling with the following criteria: (1) aged 13–19 years, (2) coming from a marginal socio-economic background, (3) actively participating in an informal education program for at least six months. A total of 20 participants were involved, consisting of 12 teenagers, 5 community facilitators, and 3 non-formal educators. This number is considered adequate to achieve data saturation in qualitative research (Guest et al., 2020). The selection

was carried out taking into account the diversity of social and gender backgrounds to enrich the findings.

Data Collection Techniques

Data collection techniques were carried out through in-depth interviews, participant observations, and community document analysis. The main instrument is a semi-structured interview guideline structured based on the concept of social identity and alternative learning space theory. The questions focused on participants' experiences in negotiating identity, forms of social interaction, as well as the meaning of informal spaces for their lives. Observations were made by recording adolescents' daily interactions in the learning community, while community documents such as activity records, non-formal curriculum, and annual reports were analyzed for data triangulation. The validity of the data is maintained through triangulation of sources, methods, and researchers, as well as member checking techniques to informants (Lincoln & Guba, 2021). Reliability is strengthened by maintaining a trail audit in the form of well-documented field notes and interview transcripts.

Research Procedure

The research procedure is carried out in several stages. *First*, the preparation stage, including the management of research permits, the preparation of interview guidelines, and coordination with the informal education community. *Second*, a three-month field data collection phase, which includes interviews, observations, and documentation. *Third*, the transcription and encoding stages of the data, are carried out manually and with the support of NVivo 14 software to assist with thematic analysis. *Fourth*, the data analysis stage, in which data is openly, axially, and selectively coded to identify key themes related to identity negotiation and the dynamics of informal learning spaces. *Fifth*, the stage of verification and validation of results through triangulation and discussion with fellow researchers. *Sixth*, the stage of preparing research reports by integrating field findings into a theoretical framework.

Data Analysis Techniques

The data analysis technique uses thematic analysis as developed by (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The analysis was carried out by identifying patterns, themes, and categories that emerged from the data, and relating them to theoretical frameworks regarding social identity, urban marginalization, and informal education. This approach was chosen because it is flexible in accommodating the complexity of qualitative data and is relevant to answering research questions. NVivo software support makes it easy to organize data, search code, and visualize relationships between themes, thereby increasing transparency and accuracy of analysis (Nowell et al., 2022).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Informal Learning Spaces as an Arena for Identity Negotiation

The results of the study show that informal learning spaces in the Cirebon community are not only alternative learning forums, but also serve as the main arena for marginalized adolescents to negotiate their identity. From in-depth interviews with 12 adolescents, the majority revealed that involvement in community activities opens up space for them to show another side of themselves that has been hidden or hampered by social environmental stigma. Previously externally attached identities such as "street kids", "school dropouts", or "young unemployed" are gradually being replaced by new, more positive identities, such as "students", "young artists", or "community members".

Field observations show that activities in informal learning spaces are not limited to academic activities alone, but also involve creative activities, group discussions, and cooperation in community projects. This dynamic provides space for adolescents to try new social roles while negotiating their identities in front of peers and facilitators. A teenager who was previously known as unemployed in his neighborhood admitted that he found a new sense of confidence after actively participating in mural activities with the community. *"If people see me outside as just an unemployed child, but here I am considered to be able to draw, I am more confident in showing my work"* (R1, interview June 12, 2025).

The quote suggests that informal learning spaces provide conditions conducive to dismantling harmful social labels, and replacing them with recognition of potential and creativity. The same thing was also conveyed by other teenagers who were initially reluctant to speak in front of the crowd, but now they are starting to dare to speak their opinions in community discussion forums. *"I used to be afraid of saying the wrong thing, but now my friends always listen first, then give input. It feels like it's really appreciated"* (R3, June 15, 2025 interview).

This process of identity negotiation is also seen in daily interactions. The facilitator encourages each member to take an active role, for example being a discussion moderator or small group chair. This practice not only strengthens leadership capacity, but also provides space for adolescents to interpret themselves as individuals who are able to contribute. *"I was surprised when I was asked to be a moderator. At first I was shaking, but after I finished, I realized that I could. It makes me more confident"* (R7, interview June 18, 2025).

Additionally, involvement in community creative activities, such as music, theater, and mural art, has been shown to provide opportunities for teens to articulate their identities symbolically. The new identity that is formed is not just a label, but also an experience that is inherent and recognized by the social environment. One of the informants stated: *"If I play music here, people no longer say I'm a street kid, but say I'm a musician. It makes me proud of myself"* (R10, June 22, 2025 interview).

Overall, these findings confirm that informal learning spaces are an important arena for marginalized youth in constructing and negotiating identity. Through a process of active participation, peer support, and recognition from facilitators, adolescents are no longer trapped in restrictive social stigma, but rather find a new identity that is more positive, empowered, and future-oriented.

Thus, informal spaces in Cirebon function not only as a place of learning, but also as a field for the transformation of the identity of urban adolescents who have been marginalized.

Dynamics of Social Interaction and Self-Recognition

The findings of the study suggest that the dynamics of social interaction in informal learning spaces play a crucial role in shaping the self-recognition of marginalized adolescents. Daily activities such as group discussions, cooperation in creative projects, and casual activities together are important means to build healthier social relationships. Adolescents who initially seem passive or even withdrawn from interactions, slowly begin to become actively involved after feeling positive encouragement and acceptance from the community. This process gives them the opportunity to experience social validation, which is the basis for the formation of confidence and recognition of their new identity.

In discussion activities, for example, facilitators deliberately give the opportunity to speak to teenagers who are usually silent. This strategy has succeeded in encouraging wider participation. One of the teenagers revealed: "*At first I just listened, afraid of making a mistake if I said it. But when the facilitator said 'please just try, there's nothing wrong', I finally dared to speak. It turned out that my friends even applauded, it made me very happy*" (R2, interview June 10, 2025). This quote shows that recognition from a peer group, while simple, can trigger significant changes in adolescent confidence.

Apart from facilitators, peers also play an important role in strengthening self-recognition. Many teens cite verbal or non-verbal support from friends as a positive energy that helps them feel accepted. One of the informants stated: "*When I am at home, I am often told that I cannot do anything. But here, friends say 'you're cool to be able to make designs'. It's a very different feeling, like I have values that people don't see outside*" (R5, interview June 14, 2025). This confirms that informal spaces not only provide a means of learning, but also become a symbolic arena where adolescents' identities are recognized and valued.

Social interaction also helps build solidarity among adolescents. In collaborative activities, they learn to negotiate roles, respect the opinions of others, and accept differences. One teenager shared an experience while working in a theater group: "*I was told to be an actor, even though I wanted to be behind the scenes. But after running it, I realized that it was possible too. My friends continue to support me, I am finally proud to be able to perform in front of a crowd*" (R8, interview June 19, 2025). This experience shows that collective support plays a role in expanding adolescents' understanding of their own capacity.

Furthermore, the dynamics of social interaction in informal spaces also create a sense of security that they rarely get in formal spaces. Some teenagers mentioned that in formal school, they were often underestimated because of their social status or family economic conditions. Instead, in the community space, they are treated equally without any stigma. One informant said: "*When I was at school I used to be called 'poor boy', it was hurtful. But here no one asks about it, everyone is treated the same. It makes me feel at home*" (R11, interview June 25, 2025). This

statement shows how equal social interaction can build a sense of acceptance and recognition as a valuable individual.

Thus, the dynamics of social interaction in informal learning spaces have proven to be not only a means of communication, but also an important mechanism for marginalized adolescents in gaining self-recognition. The validation they receive from peers and facilitators reinforces positive identities, reduces feelings of marginalization, and builds more stable confidence. This process affirms the role of informal education not only as a provider of skills, but also as an arena for identity transformation rooted in supportive and inclusive social interactions.

Capacity Building and Life Skills

The results of community document analysis and field observations show that non-formal education programs carried out in the Cirebon community have a significant impact on increasing the capacity and life skills of marginalized adolescents. The designed activities are not only oriented to the academic aspect, but also emphasize practical skills that are relevant to daily needs. The program includes digital literacy training, creative arts, and micro-entrepreneurship designed based on the active participation of adolescents.

Based on community data, there are at least three main types of skills that adolescents acquire through informal learning spaces: digital literacy, creative arts, and micro-entrepreneurship. Digital literacy became the most in-demand skill, with 9 teenagers engaged in simple photo editing and graphic design training. One of the informants explained: *"I used to only play cellphones for games, but here I was taught how to edit photos and make posters. Now I can help create online selling content, and even get additional pocket money"* (R4, interview June 11, 2025). This quote shows that digital skills not only add creativity, but also open up informal economic opportunities.

In addition to digital skills, the field of creative arts is also an important vehicle for teenagers to express themselves. Seven teenagers are involved in music, murals, and theater activities. From observations, it can be seen that art activities not only train technical skills, but also build confidence and foster a sense of belonging to a new identity as a community artist. One teenager revealed: *"If I play guitar here, I will no longer be considered a bad boy. People even say I have talent. It makes me more enthusiastic about training"* (R6, interview June 16, 2025). This statement shows how art is a more positive means of identity negotiation than the social labels that have been attached.

Micro-entrepreneurship activities also make a real contribution to the economic independence of adolescents. Six teenagers were involved in activities such as selling online or making simple crafts. This activity provides hands-on experience of small business management and communication skills in offering products. An informant said: *"I learned to sell online from here, at first it was just a trial and error. It turned out to be a sell-out as well. It feels proud to be able to earn money from your own business, not to ask your parents to keep going"* (R9, interview June 20, 2025). These findings confirm that non-formal education in the community not only strengthens aspects of identity, but also provides economic provisions that are relevant to the lives of marginalized adolescents.

Furthermore, improving these skills also affects the way adolescents view themselves. The new identities that are formed – such as "young designers," "community musicians," or "small entrepreneurs" – give them a more respectable social position than ever before. This was confirmed by one of the informants: *"I am now more confident in telling people that I can design and sell online. So people see that I am not only a village child who does not go to school, but a child who has the ability"* (R12, interview June 26, 2025).

Overall, the results of this study show that the skills acquired by adolescents in informal learning spaces are not solely technical, but function as a medium to build a more positive, empowered, and recognized self-identity by their environment. In other words, the capacity building and life skills that occur in the community is the gateway for the transformation of marginalized adolescent identities from marginalized positions to more recognized and valued social roles.

Reduction of Social Stigma and Creation of Safe Spaces

One of the key findings of this study is the role of informal learning spaces in reducing the social stigma that has been inherent in marginalized adolescents. In many cases, the stigma arises from the experience of discrimination in formal schools as well as in the broader social environment. Teenagers are often labeled as "street kids", "lazy", or "young unemployed", which makes them feel marginalised and lose confidence. Through the existence of informal learning spaces, the stigma can slowly be reduced because the community deliberately creates an inclusive, equal, and respectful atmosphere.

Interviews with facilitators show that efforts to reduce stigma are carried out consciously through admission-oriented learning strategies. One of the facilitators said: *"We try to make sure that every child who comes feels appreciated. There is no term smart or stupid child here. All have the same opportunity to learn and develop"* (F2, interview June 12, 2025). This shows that the principle of equality is used as the main foundation in designing a safe learning space. Another facilitator added: *"If there are children who are often labeled as naughty outside, we actually give an important role in the activity. That way, they can show a more positive side"* (F4, June 20, 2025 interview). This strategy shows that the community not only rejects stigma, but also actively reverses negative labels into rewardable potentials.

Field findings also show that the majority of adolescents feel safer expressing themselves in informal learning spaces than in formal schools. Of the 12 teens interviewed, 10 stated that they were more free to speak, create, and show their abilities without worrying about being humiliated or compared. One teenager revealed: *"At school, I was often laughed at when I couldn't answer questions. But here, if you can't do it, you can help your friends. So I'm not afraid of making mistakes again"* (R7, interview June 15, 2025). This quote shows that the sense of security built in the community serves as a shield against the experience of discrimination in formal spaces.

In addition to creating safe spaces, informal facilitators and educators also play an important role in accompanying the process of changing adolescents'

self-perception. A non-formal educator said: "*These children actually have great potential, it's just that they are often hampered by negative labels from the outside. Our task is to accompany them to dare to show their abilities without fear of being judged*" (P1, interview June 18, 2025). This view is in line with the explanations of other non-formal educators: "*We always try to create a welcoming learning environment, so that they feel they have a place to return and are no longer afraid of being underestimated*" (P3, interview June 25, 2025). This confirms that non-formal educators are not just teachers, but also agents of social change that help adolescents break free from negative labels.

Safe spaces are also manifested in the form of solidarity between adolescents. Observations show that they support each other when there are friends who are hesitant or feel inferior. This collective support strengthens the sense of community while creating a more humane learning environment. One of the teenagers said: "*There is no ridicule here. Even if I don't have confidence anymore, my friends encourage me. It makes me feel at home and keep coming*" (R10, interview June 23, 2025). This excerpt shows how social dynamics in the community act as a protective mechanism that reduces the impact of stigma.

Thus, it can be concluded that the reduction of social stigma in informal learning spaces occurs through a combination of inclusive learning design, the role of facilitators and non-formal educators as companions, and social support from fellow adolescents. These factors contribute to building a "safe space" that not only protects adolescents from discrimination, but also allows them to develop a positive identity, confidence, and feel recognized as valued individuals.

Transformation of the Collective Identity of Marginalized Adolescents

In addition to forming individual identities, informal learning spaces in Cirebon also play a role in building the collective identity of marginalized adolescents. This collective identity is formed through repeated interactions, solidarity, and shared experiences that foster a sense of belonging to the community. The results of the observations show that group activities, such as joint mural projects, community theater performances, and small entrepreneurial bazaars, are important moments in strengthening togetherness while creating a new narrative of who they are in the eyes of the community.

This transformation process does not happen instantaneously, but through continuous experience. One teenager said: "*I used to feel alone, like no one cared. But after joining the community, I feel like I have a new family that always supports me*" (R2, interview June 10, 2025). This quote confirms that collective identity not only builds a sense of security, but also creates a new meaning of more equal social relationships.

Facilitators play an important role in fostering collective awareness by providing space for adolescents to be actively involved in activity planning. One of the facilitators explained: "*We deliberately give responsibility to the children, for example those who organize the event or determine the theme of the activity. From there they learn that their voice matters*" (F1, interview 14 June 2025). This strategy not only fosters individual leadership, but also strengthens a sense of shared identity as a group that has a position and a voice.

Collective identities are also reflected in the narratives that adolescents build about themselves outside the community. Many of them began to reject the negative labels that were previously attached. One teenager revealed: "*If people used to call me a bad boy, now I can say that I am part of the creative community. It makes me more appreciated*" (R8, June 19, 2025 interview). This change in narrative is clear evidence of how informal learning spaces are able to shift the social position of adolescents from stigmatized to more respected.

Non-formal educators also emphasized the importance of collective identity as part of a community's sustainability strategy. One educator said: "*These children not only develop individually, but also feel that they are part of something bigger. It is this collective identity that keeps them afloat and continues to be active*" (P2, June 22, 2025 interview). This shows that strengthening collective identity is the foundation for maintaining adolescents' long-term involvement in informal learning spaces.

Furthermore, the transformation of collective identity also has an impact on the relationship between adolescents and the surrounding community. Some community activities that are exhibited to the public, such as street art festivals or digital art exhibitions, have succeeded in changing the way residents view them. One of the facilitators said: "*When children's work is displayed in public, people see them not as burdens, but as creative young people with a future*" (F5, interview June 27, 2025). This shift in perception reinforces the position of adolescents as an important part of the local community that deserves to be appreciated.

The collective identity formed in informal learning spaces is thus not only a sense of community, but also a strategy of resistance to social marginalization. One teenager affirmed: "*When we are together, it becomes harder for people to underestimate. We can show that we have the ability*" (R11, interview June 29, 2025). This shows that the transformation of collective identity not only serves to strengthen the individual, but also creates a new bargaining position in the face of a broader social structure.

Thus, it can be concluded that informal learning spaces play a catalyst in the transformation of the collective identity of marginalized adolescents. Through collaborative activities, facilitator support, mentoring of non-formal educators, and recognition from the community, adolescents are not only able to negotiate individual identities, but also build stronger collective strength. This collective identity ultimately becomes an important social capital in reducing marginalization, strengthening bargaining power, and opening up new opportunities for their future.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study show that informal learning spaces in Cirebon function not only as additional learning spaces, but also as social arenas that facilitate the process of negotiating the identities of marginalized adolescents. From the field data, it can be seen that adolescents' involvement in community activities provides opportunities to build a positive self-image, reduce social stigma, and strengthen collective identity. These findings confirm the importance

of non-formal education spaces as an alternative medium in overcoming limited access to formal education for marginalized groups in the middle city.

The process of identity negotiation experienced by adolescents in informal spaces is in line with the view that identity is a social construct that is continuously negotiated through collective experience. Recent studies show that non-formal learning spaces are able to facilitate identity transformation through layered and dialogical social experiences, especially when learners come from groups that are often marginalized (Byrne & Regan, 2021). In the context of this study, adolescents can redefine themselves from negative labels to new, more positive identities, such as creators or young business people. This shows that informal learning spaces are not just additional learning spaces, but also transformative arenas that open up symbolic mobility opportunities for participants.

The social interaction and validation that occurs in the community space reinforces the psychosocial dimension of identity formation. Simple support from peers and facilitators, whether in the form of applause or praise, creates an affective environment that enables youth to grow confidence. These findings are in line with research that emphasizes the importance of social recognition in strengthening adolescents' intrinsic motivation, especially in the context of learning outside of formal spaces (Bingham & Conner, 2021). Thus, social dynamics in a community serve a dual function: as a means of learning as well as an identity validation mechanism that strengthens the psychological attachment of individuals to their groups.

The capacity building and life skills seen through digital literacy, creative arts, and micro-entrepreneurship activities shows the significant role of informal learning spaces in expanding the role of adolescents as productive actors in the community. These findings reinforce studies that emphasize that non-formal education can enhance transformative skills relevant to society's needs and prepare young generations to face complex social dynamics (Egetenmeyer & Fedeli, 2023). Thus, the skills acquired by adolescents are not only technical, but also form strategies of resistance to structural marginalization.

Informal learning spaces also function as safe spaces that reduce social stigma. Most adolescents say they are more comfortable expressing themselves in the community than in formal schools, where they often experience discrimination. These findings are in line with research that confirms that safe spaces in non-formal education play an important role in building confidence and fostering a sense of acceptance among marginalized groups (Wegner et al., 2022). Thus, safe space is not only a normative concept, but a social reality created through inclusive and participatory community practices.

A collective identity that grows in informal spaces strengthens solidarity between adolescents and increases their bargaining power in front of society. A new narrative as a creative community replaces the old stigma-laden label. This is consistent with the theory that marginalized groups have unique perspectives that can be social capital and a source of collective strength in the face of marginalization (Carabelli & Lyon, 2022). This kind of collective identity opens

up opportunities for adolescents to reinterpret their position in society, while expanding their space for participation in social life.

The research obstacles identified include the limited number of informants, the coverage of the location that only covers one city, and the relatively short duration of observation. These factors cause the results of the study to not be generalized widely and have not fully captured the dynamics of long-term identity. For follow-up research, it is recommended to use longitudinal design so that the identity transformation process can be monitored over a longer period of time. In addition, it is necessary to conduct comparative studies in various other medium-sized cities to see more diverse patterns, as well as to include public policy analysis to assess structural support for the sustainability of informal learning spaces.

This research makes an important contribution to the development of knowledge in the field of non-formal education and adolescent identity studies. Theoretically, this study enriches the literature by presenting empirical evidence on how informal spaces can support the process of identity negotiation, reduce social stigma, and strengthen collective solidarity. Practically, the results of this research can be used as a reference for policymakers, non-governmental organizations, and local communities in designing programs that are inclusive, participatory, and responsive to the needs of marginalized adolescents. Thus, this research not only broadens academic understanding, but also has real implications for social empowerment at the local level.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study confirms that informal learning spaces in Cirebon function as a strategic medium in supporting the negotiation of the identity of marginalized adolescents. Through active involvement in the community, adolescents gain opportunities to build a positive self-image, reduce social stigma, and strengthen collective solidarity. The process of social interaction that occurs in the community provides identity validation while increasing self-confidence, so that informal spaces not only play a role as a complement to formal education, but also as a transformative arena that supports the psychosocial development of adolescents.

These findings also show that informal learning spaces are able to expand adolescents' life skills, ranging from digital literacy, creative arts, to micro-entrepreneurship, which serves as a strategy of resistance to structural marginalization. The community's success in creating safe spaces reinforces the belief that non-formal education can be an inclusive alternative for marginalized groups, while opening up opportunities for the formation of a more empowered collective identity. Thus, this research contributes to the development of non-formal education and adolescent identity studies, as well as provides practical implications for the development of social empowerment policies and programs.

However, the limitations of the number of informants, the scope of the study location, and the duration of observation limit the generalization of the results of this study. Therefore, further research is recommended using a cross-regional longitudinal and comparative approach to obtain a more complete

picture of the identity dynamics of marginalized adolescents. In addition, the integration of public policy analysis can strengthen the practical relevance of research, especially in formulating sustainable, community-based interventions for youth empowerment in urban areas.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

Future research could deepen the understanding of how informal learning spaces contribute to identity negotiation by employing longitudinal and comparative approaches across different regions and social contexts. Expanding the scope to include diverse types of communities and marginalized groups would provide a more comprehensive view of how informal education fosters empowerment and resilience. Additionally, integrating public policy analysis and examining the role of government and institutional support could enhance the practical relevance of the findings. Investigating how digital platforms and hybrid learning environments intersect with informal spaces may also reveal new strategies for promoting inclusive youth development and collective identity formation.

REFERENCES

- Assafary, A., & Husrah, H. (2020). Peran lembaga pendidikan nonformal dalam pembinaan remaja masjid. *Jurnal Pendidikan Nonformal*, 15(2), 145–160.
- Bhabha, H. K. (2024). *The location of culture* (Updated ed.). London: Routledge.
- Bingham, A. J., & Conner, L. (2021). Youth voice and informal learning: The role of social validation in identity development. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 105, 101712. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2020.101712>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021). *Thematic analysis: A practical guide*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Burke, P. J. (2024). *Identity control theory: Contemporary perspectives on self and society*. New York: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003314558>
- Byrne, D., & Regan, C. (2021). Non-formal education and the negotiation of youth identities: A participatory approach. *International Review of Education*, 67(1), 85–106. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11159-021-09903-3>
- Carabelli, G., & Lyon, D. (2022). Collective identity, marginalised youth and community participation. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 25(8), 1063–1079. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2022.2036245>
- Çolakoglu, M. H., Steegh, A., & Parchmann, I. (2023). Informal learning spaces and identity development of marginalized youth in STEM. *International Journal of Science Education*, 45(8), 1125–1143. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09500693.2023.2205673>
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2021). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Decius, J., Decius, L., & Beusaert, S. (2024). Integrating multiple theoretical perspectives on informal field-based learning: The Self-regulated Informal

- Learning Cycle. *Learning and Instruction*, 86, 101713. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.learninstruc.2023.101713>
- Djufri, A. (2025). Informal learning and spatial justice in urban education: An ethnographic study in Makassar. *Indonesian Journal of Educational Research*, 15(2), 113–128.
- Egetenmeyer, R., & Fedeli, M. (2023). Lifelong and non-formal learning in times of social transformation. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 42(2), 133–148. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370.2023.2181204>
- Gonzales, R. G. (2020). *Lives in limbo: Undocumented and coming of age in America*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Gumelar, D., Prasetyo, R., & Kartika, A. (2024). Community-based nonformal education for youth resilience in Indonesia. *Asian Education and Development Studies*, 13(2), 187–203. <https://doi.org/10.1108/AEDS-09-2023-0219>
- Guest, G., Namey, E., & Chen, M. (2020). A simple method to assess and report thematic saturation in qualitative research. *PLoS ONE*, 15(5), e0232076. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0232076>
- Harding, S. (2021). *Standpoint theory as a site of political, philosophical, and scientific debate*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197509900.001.0001>
- Haryoni, T., & Hermawati, R. (2023). Non-formal education for street children: Community intervention in Yogyakarta. *Indonesian Journal of Social Development*, 12(1), 55–70.
- Imsiyah, N., Supriyono, Hardika, Wahyuni, S., & Alkornia, S. (2023). Transformative learning patterns based on non-formal education in marginal communities in Bondowoso District. *AIP Conference Proceedings*, 2679(1), 070009. <https://doi.org/10.1063/5.0111754>
- Laila, D. A., & Salahudin, M. (2022). The contribution of non-formal education to the empowerment of marginalized communities in Indonesia. *Journal of Community Empowerment*, 9(3), 201–212.
- Lea, J. (2020). Marginalized youth and the need for inclusive educational spaces. *Urban Education*, 55(7), 1034–1055. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085918770786>
- Lewis, J., Martin, P., & Sánchez, A. (2024). Rethinking hybridity: Revisiting Bhabha's third space in contemporary identity studies. *Cultural Studies*, 38(3), 410–428. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502386.2024.2354678>
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (2021). *Naturalistic inquiry* (50th anniversary ed.). Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Maemonah, S., Hernawati, R., Basori, A., & Sijabat, R. (2024). Smart House community model and the reduction of juvenile delinquency in Papua. *Indonesian Journal of Community Studies*, 6(1), 44–58.
- Margono, S. (2025). Hybrid identities of urban marginal youth in Indonesia. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 28(1), 56–73. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2025.2391007>
- Mohd Zaharim, N., Ahmad, R., & Salleh, N. (2020). Identity negotiation among marginalized youth in Malaysia. *Asian Journal of Youth Studies*, 8(2), 65–80.

- Nowell, L. S., Norris, J. M., White, D. E., & Moules, N. J. (2022). Thematic analysis: Striving to meet the trustworthiness criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 21(1), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069221100986>
- Safitri, H. W., & Tamrin, A. M. H. (2025). Sociolinguistic variations and identity negotiation among urban youth in multilingual communities. *Journal of Mandalika Social Science*, 3(1), 55–69. <https://doi.org/10.59613/jomss.v3i1.253>
- Saar, E., & Räis, M. (2022). Safe spaces in nonformal education: Empowering marginalized youth. *European Journal of Education*, 57(4), 623–639. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ejed.12508>
- Wegner, E., Pullen, D., & Ang, H. (2022). Safe spaces and youth empowerment in non-formal education settings. *European Journal of Education*, 57(3), 465–478. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ejed.12545>
- Wood, K., Harrison, L., & Taylor, R. (2021). Nonformal education and identity work among marginalized youth. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 24(6), 731–747. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2021.1877775>
- Yazan, B. (2022). Three approaches to case study methods in education: Yin, Merriam, and Stake. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 102, 103344. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2021.103344>
- Yen, K. H., & Zairul, M. (2024). Safe space for traumatic urban youths. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 14(8), 1760–1777. <https://doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v14-i8/22548>