

Empowering Uneducated Workers in Kediri Regency to Increase Employment Opportunities

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ARTICLE INFO



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Keywords:

Uneducated Workforce; Workforce Empowerment; Job Opportunities.

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.33096/jmb.v13i1.1395>

ABSTRACT

Uneducated workers are a vulnerable group within the Kediri Regency's labor structure due to limited formal education and low access to decent jobs. This research aims to analyze the conditions of the uneducated workforce and empowerment strategies to increase employment opportunities. The research uses a descriptive qualitative approach through document and literature studies from BPS data, the Department of Manpower, and previous research. The research results show that the number of uneducated workers fluctuated between 2020 and 2024 but remained high. Empowerment strategies include capacity building, community-based economic empowerment, and expanding access to sustainable and locally adaptive regional employment.

ABSTRAK

Tenaga kerja tidak terdidik merupakan kelompok rentan dalam struktur ketenagakerjaan Kabupaten Kediri akibat keterbatasan pendidikan formal dan rendahnya akses terhadap pekerjaan layak. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis kondisi tenaga kerja tidak terdidik serta strategi pemberdayaan untuk meningkatkan peluang kerja. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif melalui studi dokumen dan literatur dari data BPS, Dinas Tenaga Kerja, serta penelitian terdahulu. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan jumlah tenaga kerja tidak terdidik periode 2020-2024 berfluktuasi namun tetap tinggi. Strategi pemberdayaan meliputi peningkatan kapasitas, pemberdayaan ekonomi berbasis komunitas, dan perluasan akses kerja yang berkelanjutan dan adaptif lokal daerah.



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INTRODUCTION

Labor refers to individuals capable of working to earn income for meeting their living needs (Haydarsyah & Nilasari, 2021). In Indonesia, the workforce comprises the population aged 15-65 years who are physically, mentally, and intellectually capable of working (Suryawan, 2021). One of the major labor challenges in Indonesia is the high proportion of uneducated workers (Herlinda & Bakar, 2023). Uneducated workers (\leq Primary School) defined as workers with low educational attainment (Maheswari et al., 2025). This group generally consists of individuals who have completed only primary education or have not completed primary school, which significantly limits their access to employment opportunities (Gracia et al., 2025). Those who are employed often receive low wages and work under inadequate conditions (Rahmawati, 2023), largely due to social stigma that perceives them as less competent, as well as the growing risk of job displacement caused by rapid technological advancement (Zhuang, 2025).

Uneducated workers remain a vulnerable group within the employment structure of Kediri Regency (Agusalim et al., 2025), particularly amid increasingly competitive and skill-intensive labor market dynamics. Limited formal education restricts their access to decent employment, increasing their concentration in the informal sector with low income and minimal job protection (Satriawan, 2023). Despite various workforce quality improvement programs,

challenges faced by uneducated workers persist and remain inadequately addressed (Herlambang et al., 2024). This situation underscores the need for empowerment strategies that extend beyond short-term labor absorption to emphasize capacity building, independence, and economic sustainability. Accordingly, this study is important for critically examining empowerment strategies for uneducated workers to contribute academically and inform more inclusive, appropriate, and sustainable employment policies in Kediri Regency.

Previous studies have examined empowerment and skills development strategies for groups with limited education or employment access. Dewi et al. (2025) found that multi-actor collaboration among government institutions, Vocational Training Centers (BLK), and industry significantly improves workforce quality through training and competency certification, thereby enhancing labor market readiness. Similarly, Pancawijaya et al. (2025) explain that human capital-based job training implemented by Vocational Training Centers (BLK) is able to reduce structural unemployment by enhancing the technical competencies of the local workforce, emphasizing the importance of training that is aligned with industry needs. These findings highlight that effective empowerment strategies require relevant training, cross-stakeholder collaboration, and strong linkages with the industrial sector, providing a key foundation for this study on empowering uneducated workers in Kediri Regency.

The novelty of this study lies in its specific focus on uneducated workers as the primary subjects of empowerment rather than merely objects of labor absorption, using a district-level contextual analysis approach. Unlike previous studies that broadly emphasized workforce skill improvement or vocational training program evaluation, this research integrates temporal dynamics of uneducated workers with an analysis of empowerment strategies encompassing capacity building, community-based economic strengthening, and expanded access to employment opportunities. Supported by empirical evidence from previous studies and official statistics, this approach results in a more flexible, inclusive, and sustainable empowerment strategy model.

This study focuses on analyzing empowerment strategies for uneducated workers in Kediri Regency to enhance employment opportunities. It examines the conditions and challenges faced by uneducated workers, the forms of empowerment implemented by local governments, communities, and local economic actors, and the effectiveness of these strategies in expanding access to and improving the quality of employment. Accordingly, the objectives of this research are to comprehensively describe existing empowerment strategies, analyze their relationship with increasing the capacity and independence of uneducated workers, and formulate recommendations for more adaptive, inclusive, and sustainable strategies aligned with the local economic characteristics and needs of Kediri Regency.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive research type to analyze the empowerment strategies for uneducated workers in Kediri Regency in order to increase employment opportunities. Data collection was carried out through document studies and literature reviews. The document study utilized secondary data sourced from official publications of the Central Bureau of Statistics, reports from the Department of Manpower, and relevant local government policy documents, while the literature review was conducted by examining a number of scientific journal articles and previous research findings related to the empowerment of uneducated workers. Data were analyzed qualitatively through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing to gain a comprehensive

understanding of the conditions of uneducated workers and the empowerment strategies implemented. Data validity is maintained through source credibility checks and consistency between references.

This study uses secondary data from BPS Kediri Regency covering the period 2020–2024, including labor force statistics by educational attainment. The data are presented in tabular form to identify trends in the number of uneducated workers over time. The literature review includes peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2021–2025, selected based on relevance to labor empowerment, education level, and employment opportunities. Data analysis was conducted through thematic analysis, where information from documents and literature was grouped into key themes such as labor conditions, empowerment strategies, and employment implications.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Condition of Uneducated Workers (≤ Primary School) in Kediri Regency

Based on the results of a document study of labor data from 2020–2024, workers with education levels ≤ Primary School still constitute a significant group within the labor force structure of Kediri Regency. The number of uneducated workers shows a fluctuating pattern from year to year but generally remains at a high level. This condition indicates that the issue of low educational attainment among the workforce is structural and has not been addressed sustainably.

Table 1. Number of Uneducated Workers (≤ Primary School) in Kediri Regency, 2020–2024

Year	Number of Uneducated Workers (People)	Working-Age Population (People)	Percentage of the Workforce (%)
2020	345,932	878,611	39.37
2021	327,180	867,700	37.71
2022	368,333	865,206	42.58
2023	345,992	910,477	38.01
2024	320,381	952,912	33.62

Source: Central Statistics Agency (BPS) Kediri Regency (2021-2025)

This figure represents approximately a substantial proportion of the total labor force in Kediri Regency, indicating the structural nature of low educational attainment among workers. Based on Table 1., the number and proportion of uneducated workers (≤ primary school) in Kediri Regency during the 2020–2024 period exhibited a fluctuating pattern, while remaining relatively large in relation to the total working-age population. The proportion declined in 2021, increased significantly in 2022 to its highest level, and then decreased again in 2023 and 2024 alongside growth in the working-age population. Despite this decline toward the end of the period, uneducated workers continued to account for more than one-third of the labor force, indicating that low educational attainment remains a structural issue requiring targeted and sustainable empowerment strategies to enhance workforce capacity and employment opportunities.

Implications of Uneducated Workers (≤ Primary School) Force Conditions on Employment Opportunities

The results of the document analysis show that although most of the uneducated workforce is absorbed into economic activities, the types of jobs they enter are generally in the informal sector and low-wage jobs. Limited formal education leads to low competitiveness among uneducated workers in accessing formal jobs that require specific skills and certifications. This has an impact on limited opportunities for income and welfare improvement.

This condition aligns with findings in labor literature, which state that uneducated workers tend to be employed in sectors that do not provide job security. With a relatively large and increasing number during certain periods, uneducated workers have the potential to exacerbate socio-economic inequality if available job opportunities are not accompanied by capacity building and labor protection.

Overall, the research results indicate that the number of uneducated workers in Kediri Regency is still relatively high and fluctuated during the 2020–2024 period. This condition underscores the importance of empowerment strategies that not only emphasize labor absorption but also capacity building and access to more decent and sustainable employment opportunities.

Strategy for Empowering Uneducated Workers (≤ Primary School)

Based on a review of policy documents and literature, the strategy for empowering uneducated workers in Kediri Regency can be classified into several main approaches, namely capacity building, community-based economic empowerment, and expanding access to employment opportunities.

Table 2. Forms of Empowerment Strategies for Uneducated Workers (≤ Primary School)

Strategic Aspects	Forms of Empowerment
Capacity building	Basic skills training, non-formal training, workplace literacy improvement
Economic empowerment	Joint business group, household-based MSMEs
Access job opportunities	Labor-intensive program, partnership with the local business sector
Institutional support	The role of local government and employment programs

Source: Processed by the Researcher (2026)

Empowerment strategies focused on increasing the capacity of uneducated workers are becoming increasingly important given their limited formal education. Practical skills training and community-based economic empowerment are considered more relevant because they align with the characteristics of the uneducated workforce and the local economic structure. Additionally, expanding access to employment opportunities through labor-intensive programs and business partnerships has the potential to increase the participation of uneducated workers in more productive economic activities.

Analysis of the Linkage between Empowerment Strategies and Increased Employment Opportunities

The research findings indicate that empowerment strategies that are not only focused on labor absorption but also on increasing capacity and economic independence have greater potential to improve employment opportunities for uneducated workers. Community-based

empowerment and institutional support can expand access to work while also enhancing income sustainability.

The link between empowerment strategies and job opportunities is evident in the ability of uneducated workers to adapt to the needs of the local labor market. Partial strategies tend to produce short-term impacts, while integrated strategies that combine training, economic empowerment, and job access have the potential to deliver more sustainable results. Therefore, the empowerment of uneducated workers needs to be designed systematically and contextually to address the dynamics of the labor market in Kediri Regency.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the research findings and discussions, uneducated workers in Kediri Regency remained a significant component of the labor structure during the 2020–2024 period. Despite fluctuations, the proportion of workers with education levels \leq primary school remained high, indicating that low educational attainment is a persistent structural issue. This condition restricts access to formal and decent employment, leading most uneducated workers to be absorbed into the informal sector with low income, limited job protection, and weak economic sustainability. The findings further demonstrate that limited formal education reduces workers' competitiveness amid increasingly demanding labor market dynamics, potentially intensifying socio-economic vulnerability and welfare inequality in Kediri Regency if not addressed through effective empowerment efforts.

The empowerment strategies for uneducated workers identified in this study include capacity building through basic and non-formal skills training, community-based economic initiatives such as business groups and household MSMEs, and expanded access to employment through labor-intensive programs and partnerships with local businesses. The findings indicate that integrated and context-specific strategies supported by local government institutions are more effective in enhancing employment opportunities and economic independence than approaches focused solely on short-term labor absorption. Therefore, increasing employment opportunities for uneducated workers in Kediri Regency requires a comprehensive, adaptive, and sustainable empowerment strategy that considers local economic conditions and the actual needs of uneducated workers to promote long-term welfare improvement and economic sustainability.

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