

## UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN STRENGTHENING DIASPORA ECONOMIC ROLE: THE CASE OF BINUS UNIVERSITY AT THE JAVANESE DIASPORA INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines how university community engagement contributes to strengthening the economic participation of diaspora communities. Using the involvement of BINUS University in the Javanese Diaspora International Congress 2025 as a case study, the research explores how educational initiatives can enhance diaspora understanding of Indonesia’s economic environment. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed, drawing on participatory observation during three community workshops focusing on investment opportunities, taxation systems, and SME collaboration. Data were collected through field observations, workshop materials, and secondary documentation from media coverage and congress reports. The findings indicate that the workshops improved diaspora participants’ understanding of investment pathways, regulatory frameworks, and opportunities for collaboration with Indonesian small and medium enterprises. In addition, the congress highlighted the importance of cultural identity in sustaining diaspora engagement and strengthening transnational networks. The study demonstrates that higher education institutions can function as knowledge intermediaries that connect cultural identity, economic literacy, and policy communication, thereby supporting diaspora participation in national development.

**Keywords:** Diaspora Engagement, Community Engagement, Investment Literacy, Taxation Literacy, SMEs, BINUS University

## A. INTRODUCTION

Diaspora communities operate as both preservers of cultural heritage and actors within transnational economic activity. Their embedded social networks, cultural capital, and mobility enable them to contribute to cross-border investment, trade intermediation, and knowledge exchange. Global mobility has expanded the potential of diaspora groups to influence trade, investment, and knowledge exchange (Kapur, 2004; Newland, 2010). The Javanese diaspora, with long-established communities in Suriname, the Netherlands, and Southeast Asia, illustrates how shared heritage and cultural identity can support economic collaboration (Lozano Riaño, L., 2022). Collectively, these dynamics demonstrate that cultural continuity within diaspora networks not only reinforces communal identity but also functions as a strategic asset that enhances their capacity to participate in and shape transnational economic development.

The Javanese Diaspora International Congress 2025 in Yogyakarta provided a platform for cultural revitalization and economic dialogue (Kraton Jogja, 2025). Binus University participated through community engagement activities focused on investment, taxation, and SME development. These sessions aimed to enhance diaspora literacy in navigating Indonesia's business and fiscal landscape. These educational sessions were designed to strengthen diaspora literacy in interpreting Indonesia's business environment, fiscal policies, and regulatory requirements. Collectively, the university's involvement demonstrates how higher education institutions can bridge cultural identity and economic capacity-building within transnational diaspora networks.

Despite extensive literature on diaspora contributions, the role of universities as community partners in strengthening diaspora economic capacity remains underexplored. This study therefore examines how university-led community engagement can enhance the economic capabilities of diaspora groups and investigates the ways in which investment and taxation literacy contribute to

their participation in Indonesian business activities. Understanding this dual role is essential for assessing how educational interventions can align cultural identity with economic empowerment and thereby support more effective engagement between diasporas, universities, and national development agendas.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical foundation of this study draws on interdisciplinary perspectives from diaspora studies, community engagement, and economic development to explain how cultural identity and knowledge exchange shape the participation of transnational communities in economic activities. Scholars argue that diaspora engagement is embedded in transnational social fields where cultural reproduction, mobility, and economic participation intersect (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004; Vertovec, 2009). Understanding these conceptual underpinnings is crucial for analyzing how university initiatives connect with diaspora networks and contribute to capacity-building efforts, particularly through education and knowledge transfer (Brinkerhoff, 2008; Watson, 2013). By placing diaspora engagement within wider conversations on cultural preservation, economic agency, and institutional collaboration, this study explores how educational initiatives strengthen the diaspora's capacity to navigate Indonesia's fiscal and business environment. The framework begins by viewing diaspora communities not only as guardians of cultural heritage but also as active economic contributors. Their shared identity, transnational networks, and mobility provide the foundation for understanding the economic opportunities they can create and the roles they can play in Indonesia's development.

### **Diaspora as Cultural and Economic Actors**

Diaspora networks preserve cultural identity while simultaneously engaging in economic activities such as remittances, entrepreneurship, and trade (Brinkerhoff, 2009; Gamlen, 2014). Their shared cultural background often becomes a foundation of trust and social capital that smooths cross-

border collaboration. Events like the Javanese Diaspora Congress allow members to reconnect with their heritage while opening space for new economic partnerships. Recent scholarship also highlights that remittances extend beyond simple financial transfers; they operate as pathways through which diasporas participate more actively in shaping development outcomes in their countries of origin (Klekowski von Koppenfels, 2017; Andonova & Pérez, 2024). In addition, diaspora organizations increasingly play a bridging role by mobilizing social, human, and financial capital, strengthening their ability to support integration, encourage investment, and promote entrepreneurial initiatives across borders (Ahmed, 2018; Mawed, 2024).

### **Investment, Accounting, and Taxation Literacy**

Economic participation requires familiarity with regulatory systems, financial management, and taxation principles. Prior research emphasizes that literacy in these areas affects business compliance, investor confidence, and SME growth (Bird & Zolt, 2011; Beck & Demirguc-Kunt, 2006). For diaspora communities, such knowledge enables informed decision-making and supports engagement in formal economic channels. It also reduces the risks associated with entering unfamiliar markets, allowing diaspora investors to navigate legal and administrative procedures with greater confidence. Strengthening financial and regulatory literacy can therefore widen access to investment opportunities while promoting long-term entrepreneurial resilience. Ultimately, equipping diaspora actors with these competencies helps bridge the gap between intention and effective participation in their home country's economic development.

### **University Community Engagement**

Higher education institutions function as knowledge intermediaries. Community engagement activities provide not only technical expertise but also social connections with communities (Watson, 2013). In diaspora contexts, universities help to translate policy frameworks into accessible

information while nurturing cultural ties. By offering learning platforms and mentorship support, universities make it easier for diaspora members to understand and engage with institutional processes. This role helps connect academic knowledge with practical needs, encouraging more inclusive and sustainable participation.

Beyond knowledge transfer, universities increasingly function as learning platforms that translate policy frameworks into practical guidance for communities. Academic institutions often serve as intermediaries between government policy design and community-level implementation by interpreting regulatory frameworks and converting them into accessible educational formats (Bender & Lipman, 2015; Watson, 2013). Through workshops, training modules, and mentoring programs, universities can simplify complex policy environments such as investment regulations, taxation systems, and SME compliance requirements allowing community actors to engage more effectively with institutional structures. In diaspora contexts, such learning platforms are particularly valuable because they help bridge geographical distance and informational gaps between diaspora members and their country of origin.

## **B. IMPLEMENTATION AND METHODS**

A descriptive qualitative approach was employed to examine how Binus University's community engagement activities supported diaspora empowerment. Data were collected through participatory observations, documentation, and secondary materials. The research involved direct participation in three community workshops conducted during the Congress on 12 -14 June 2025: *Opportunity to Invest in Indonesia*, *Taxation in Indonesian Business*, and *How to Do Business in Indonesia with SMEs*. During these sessions, researchers acted both as facilitators and observers, documenting participant interactions, questions, and responses. This dual role allowed for a grounded understanding of how information was delivered, interpreted, and utilised by diaspora participants.

Primary data were gathered through field notes, workshop materials, and informal discussions with participants. These were complemented by secondary data obtained from local media coverage and publicly available reports documenting the Javanese Diaspora International Congress, including reports from RRI Yogyakarta (2025), TVRI Yogyakarta News (2025), BINUS University. (2025) and other regional media platforms that covered the event and highlighted the participation of diaspora communities from multiple countries. These sources provided additional contextual information regarding the scale of the congress and the interactions between diaspora participants and local institutions. This approach enabled a structured interpretation of how the workshops contributed to diaspora empowerment and understanding of Indonesia's economic landscape. These materials documented the participation of more than 100 Javanese diaspora representatives from several countries, including the Netherlands, Suriname, Singapore, Malaysia, and the United States, and provided additional contextual information regarding the scale and international nature of the event.

To interpret the qualitative data, the study applied systematic thematic analysis following the procedures outlined by Creswell (2014). Field notes and workshop documentation were repeatedly reviewed to identify recurring patterns related to diaspora economic engagement. The data were subsequently coded into several analytical categories, including investment literacy, taxation understanding, SME entrepreneurship awareness, and policy interpretation. These codes were developed inductively from participant interactions, discussion dynamics, and the questions raised during the workshops, allowing the analysis to capture how diaspora participants interpreted and responded to the information delivered during the engagement activities.

Following the coding stage, the identified themes were interpreted in relation to the study's theoretical framework on diaspora engagement and university community involvement. To enhance the credibility of the findings, data triangulation was conducted by comparing observational field notes with workshop materials, congress documentation, and media coverage of the event. This

triangulation process helped ensure that the interpretations reflected both the immediate workshop interactions and the broader context of the congress activities. Through this analytical procedure, the study was able to identify how university-led educational interventions contributed to strengthening diaspora economic literacy and improving participants' confidence in navigating Indonesia's investment and business environment. Additional contextual documentation of the congress activities was also obtained from several media outlets and institutional communication channels (RRI Yogyakarta, 2025; TVRI Yogyakarta News, 2025; Kreasindo, 2025; Benisutanto, 2025; BINUS University, 2025).

### **C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The findings reveal how academic engagement within diaspora forums can simultaneously strengthen economic literacy, cultural identity, and institutional collaboration. The workshops contributed significantly to strengthening participants' investment literacy. Diaspora members reported gaining a clearer understanding of investment pathways, sectoral opportunities, regulatory requirements, and risk considerations. This aligns with earlier arguments that diasporas can contribute not only financial capital but also informed and strategic entrepreneurial activity in their home countries (Kuznetsov, 2006).

The community engagement activities were conducted as part of the Javanese Diaspora International Congress 2025, held from 9–16 June 2025 in the cultural cities of Solo and Yogyakarta. The congress brought together more than 100 members of the Javanese diaspora from various countries, including Suriname, the Netherlands, the United States, and several Southeast Asian countries. Coordinated by the Global Javanese Diaspora network under the leadership of Ine Waworuntu, the congress served as a transnational platform for strengthening cultural connections

while exploring opportunities for economic collaboration between diaspora communities and institutions in Indonesia.

Within this context, BINUS University through the School of Accounting contributed to the congress by organizing a community service program on 12 June 2025 in Yogyakarta, aimed at enhancing diaspora economic literacy and facilitating knowledge exchange between academic institutions and diaspora communities. The program consisted of three educational sessions designed to improve diaspora understanding of Indonesia's economic and regulatory environment. The sessions were delivered by Armanto Witjaksono, Ismi Fathia Rahmi, and Evy Steelyana, who shared practical insights related to investment opportunities, taxation systems, and strategies for conducting business with small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Indonesia. Through these sessions, the academic team translated regulatory and economic knowledge into accessible guidance for diaspora members interested in engaging with Indonesia's economic ecosystem.

### **Investment Opportunities and Diaspora Economic Participation**

The first session, delivered by Armanto Witjaksono, focused on investment opportunities in Indonesia. The discussion introduced participants to key sectors with potential for diaspora investment and explained the regulatory environment governing investment activities. Participants gained insights into investment pathways, legal procedures, and risk considerations associated with entering the Indonesian market. The session emphasized that diaspora communities can act not only as sources of financial capital but also as carriers of entrepreneurial knowledge and international networks. This finding aligns with previous studies suggesting that diaspora communities often function as strategic actors in fostering transnational economic activity and investment in their countries of origin (Kuznetsov, 2006).

## Taxation Literacy and Regulatory Compliance

The second session, presented by Ismi Fathia Rahmi, addressed taxation in Indonesian business practices. The discussion focused on Indonesia's taxation framework, including value-added tax (VAT), SME income taxation, and available fiscal incentives for business actors (figure 1-3). Many diaspora participants indicated that limited knowledge of taxation regulations had previously been a barrier to engaging in formal business activities in Indonesia. Through the session, participants developed a clearer understanding of compliance requirements and administrative procedures, which increased their confidence in considering formal investment and business opportunities. Improving taxation literacy is essential for encouraging diaspora participation in regulated economic activities and ensuring transparency and sustainability in business operations (Bird & Zolt, 2011).



**Figure 1.** Community engagement session on diaspora investment literacy during the International Congress, Yogyakarta, June 2025. *Source: Authors' documentation*

## SME Engagement and Business Ecosystem in Indonesia

The third session, delivered by Evy Steelyana, focused on how diaspora entrepreneurs can engage with small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Indonesia. The discussion highlighted the strategic role of SMEs as key drivers of Indonesia's economy and explored potential collaboration between diaspora entrepreneurs and local SME networks. Participants were introduced to practical approaches for building partnerships with SMEs, including opportunities in export–import activities, product distribution, and cross-border market access. The session emphasized that diaspora networks can function as bridges connecting Indonesian SMEs with international markets, thereby expanding business opportunities while strengthening economic ties between diaspora communities and their country of origin.

Beyond the economic discussions, the congress also highlighted the importance of cultural identity in sustaining diaspora engagement. The event was opened by Kanjeng Pangeran Harya (KPH) Wironegoro, a member of the Yogyakarta royal family and son-in-law of Sultan Hamengkubuwono X. In his remarks, he emphasized the Javanese philosophical principle of *Memayu Hayuning Bawana*, which encourages individuals to contribute to social harmony while maintaining strong cultural identity. This message reinforced the importance of preserving cultural values as a foundation for building trust and collaboration among diaspora communities across different national contexts.



**Figure 2.** Interaction between BINUS University facilitators and diaspora participants during the workshop session. *Source: Authors' documentation.*

The congress also created opportunities for broader institutional collaboration. During a visit to the Pendopo of Gunung Kidul Regency, participants met with the regional government and discussed the potential development of a sister city partnership between Gunung Kidul Regency and the City of Best in Brabant, the Netherlands. This initiative illustrates how diaspora networks can support cultural diplomacy while simultaneously facilitating economic cooperation between local governments and international communities.

Overall, the interaction between diaspora communities, cultural representatives, local government, and academic institutions created a platform where cultural identity, knowledge exchange, and economic engagement intersected. These findings indicate that diaspora gatherings can function not

only as cultural reunions but also as strategic arenas for strengthening transnational networks that support economic participation and collaborative development.



**Figure 3.** Opening session of the Javanese Diaspora International Congress with KPH Wironegoro and diaspora representatives. *Source: Authors' documentation.*

From a theoretical perspective, the findings highlight the intermediary role of universities as knowledge brokers within diaspora networks. While existing scholarship often emphasizes diaspora remittances and entrepreneurship (Brinkerhoff, 2009; Kuznetsov, 2006), this study demonstrates that universities can strengthen diaspora participation by translating regulatory frameworks and economic knowledge into accessible learning platforms. In this sense, university-led community engagement can bridge policy environments, cultural identity, and economic capability-building, thereby expanding the role of higher education institutions in supporting diaspora-driven development.

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

This study demonstrates that university-led community engagement can strengthen the economic role of diaspora communities by improving their understanding of investment opportunities, taxation systems, and collaboration with small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Through its participation in the Javanese Diaspora International Congress 2025, BINUS University provided educational sessions that helped diaspora participants better understand Indonesia's regulatory environment and business opportunities. The findings highlight three key areas where

academic engagement can support diaspora economic participation. First, investment literacy improved participants' understanding of sectoral opportunities, regulatory pathways, and potential risks associated with investing in Indonesia. Second, taxation literacy increased participants' awareness of Indonesia's fiscal framework, including VAT, SME taxation, and compliance procedures, which helped reduce uncertainty in formal business engagement. Third, discussions on SME collaboration demonstrated how diaspora networks can serve as bridges connecting Indonesian SMEs with international markets.

Beyond economic literacy, the congress also emphasized the importance of cultural identity in sustaining diaspora engagement. Cultural values and shared heritage continue to play an important role in strengthening trust and collaboration among diaspora communities across different countries. From a broader perspective, this study highlights the strategic role of universities as knowledge intermediaries within diaspora networks. By translating complex regulatory frameworks and economic policies into accessible learning platforms, universities can help connect diaspora communities with national development opportunities. In this sense, university community engagement can function as a bridge between policy environments, cultural identity, and economic capability-building, thereby supporting diaspora participation in national development.

Future initiatives may benefit from developing continuous learning platforms, structured mentoring programs, and stronger collaboration between universities, diaspora organizations, and government institutions. Such efforts could further enhance diaspora participation in economic activities while strengthening transnational networks that support sustainable development. This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. The analysis focuses on a single case of university engagement during the Javanese Diaspora International Congress, which limits the ability to generalize the findings to all diaspora contexts. In addition, the observations were conducted during a relatively short event-based intervention, making it difficult to assess long-term behavioral changes

among participants. Nevertheless, the findings provide useful insights into how universities can contribute to diaspora economic empowerment through community engagement and knowledge exchange.

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No AI tools were employed in generating data, findings, interpretations, or conclusions. All empirical descriptions, observations, and qualitative analyses were produced manually by the authors based on direct participation in the Javanese Diaspora International Congress 2025. The final manuscript has been thoroughly reviewed and edited by the authors to ensure accuracy, originality, and compliance with SEEIJ’s requirement that AI-generated content does not exceed 25% of the total manuscript.

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