

Organisational Learning and Adaptation in Non-formal Vocational Education: A Phenomenological Inquiry into Institutional Resilience Under VUCA Conditions

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Abstract

Nonformal vocational education and training providers frequently operate under unstable funding, fragmented regulation, market uncertainty, and limited policy protection, yet little is known about how organisational learning enables their long-term adaptation. This study examined how LKP Oase Academy, a spa-therapy training institution established in Malang, Indonesia, learned and adapted across more than two decades of environmental adversity. A qualitative phenomenological design was employed to analyse the lived organisational experiences of six informants representing managerial, instructional, administrative, partnership, and alumni perspectives. Data were generated over fourteen months through in-depth semi-structured interviews, observation, and documentary analysis, and were analysed through data condensation, phenomenological meaning clustering, and iterative coding. The analysis reconstructed twenty organisational phases between 2002 and 2025 and identified three interconnected adaptive mechanisms: curriculum and pedagogical repositioning, strategic market and partnership reconfiguration, and financial and operational restructuring. These mechanisms emerged in response to market formation difficulties, occupational stigma, reputational contestation, regulatory fragmentation, curriculum displacement by formal vocational schools, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the founder's serious illness. The findings show that organisational adaptation was enabled by the cumulative conversion of adversity into regulatory knowledge, documentary safeguards, partnership routines, revised curricula, and operational procedures. The study introduces *ketahanmalangan*, or adversity-driven institutional resilience, to explain a historically accumulated form of resilience that is biographically mediated, organisationally institutionalised, and critically shaped by structural precarity. The findings imply that VET policy should strengthen inter-ministerial coordination and complementarity between formal and nonformal providers, while institutional leaders should distribute tacit knowledge, formalise learning, and strengthen succession and partnership governance.

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Introduction

Nonformal vocational education and training (VET) providers occupy a consequential yet institutionally ambiguous position within national skills systems. They often deliver flexible, practice-oriented programmes to learners and labour-market segments that formal institutions do not adequately reach, while operating with weaker funding, recognition, and policy protection. Contemporary VET scholarship therefore argues that providers should be assessed not only through

employability or supply-and-demand indicators, but also through their contributions to human development, social inclusion, sustainable livelihoods, and responsive skills ecosystems (McGrath et al., 2022; McGrath & Ramsarup, 2024; Soliman, 2025). This perspective is particularly relevant in developing economies, where fragmented institutions and volatile labour markets require nonformal providers to combine educational, regulatory, and employment-brokering functions.

In Indonesia, course and training institutions (*Lembaga Kursus dan Pelatihan*, LKPs) supplement formal education through competency-based programmes, short courses, and occupational preparation. Their flexibility is nevertheless accompanied by structural vulnerability. Many depend on tuition revenue, compete in open markets, and negotiate overlapping certification requirements across government agencies. Research in developing VET systems shows that weak coordination among the state, employers, providers, and labour-market institutions can create persistent gaps between policy intentions and operational realities (Emmenegger et al., 2019; Mende et al., 2025; Suharno et al., 2020). These pressures intensify when formal institutions reproduce nonformal curricula, occupational fields carry social stigma, or public recognition does not correspond to providers' contributions to curriculum innovation and industry placement.

Organisational learning is therefore central to institutional continuity. It concerns the processes through which experience is interpreted, converted into shared knowledge, and embedded in routines and decisions. Organisational adaptation refers to intentional actions through which members reduce misalignment between the organisation and its economic or institutional environment. Recent scholarship treats these processes as mutually constitutive: adaptation generates experience that becomes a learning resource, while accumulated learning shapes the capacity to recognise threats, revise assumptions, and reconfigure practices (Eriksson & Hallberg, 2022; Mutebi et al., 2022; Rupčić, 2023; Sarta et al., 2021). This approach directs attention to longitudinal cycles of environmental sensing, interpretation, experimentation, institutionalisation, and renewed action.

Organisational resilience provides a related but distinct lens. Contemporary models conceptualise resilience as a process or meta-capability involving anticipation, coping, adaptation, learning, and renewal rather than simple resistance or recovery. Resilient organisations maintain critical functions while potentially generating new capabilities, routines, and relationships through adversity (Duchek, 2020; Gover & Duxbury, 2018; Hillmann & Guenther, 2021). Crisis research likewise shows that learning between disruptive episodes can transform crisis management from a reactive activity into an organisational learning system (Eriksson & Hallberg, 2022). Yet resilience remains conceptually ambiguous, particularly regarding whether it constitutes an antecedent, process, outcome, or combination of these elements (de Vries & Hamilton, 2021; Hepfer & Lawrence, 2022; Su & Junge, 2023). Longitudinal inquiry is thus needed to demonstrate how resilience develops in resource-constrained institutions.

Several mechanisms explain how learning may support adaptation under prolonged uncertainty. Double-loop learning allows organisations to question governing assumptions rather than merely correct errors within established routines. Dynamic capabilities involve sensing environmental change, seizing opportunities, and reconfiguring resources, while absorptive capacity concerns recognising, assimilating, and applying external knowledge. These mechanisms are strengthened through organisational networks, collaborative learning, and deliberate systems for retaining experience (Mutebi et al., 2022; Nenonen et al., 2024; Rupčić, 2023; B. K. Williams & Brown,

2018). They also support market shaping because providers in emerging or contested occupational fields may need to educate stakeholders, construct legitimacy, and influence demand rather than respond to an established market (Halinen et al., 2026; Peprah et al., 2024; Sandvik et al., 2024).

In educational organisations, adult and lifelong learning can function as organisational infrastructure rather than only as programme content. Sustainable organisational learning requires arrangements that convert individual experience into collective routines, support reflection on failure, and maintain learning across organisational boundaries (Brandi & Christensen, 2018; Oonk et al., 2022; Rupčić, 2023). Such boundary-crossing learning is important in VET because providers connect instruction with employers, professional standards, government agencies, graduates, and community expectations. Deliberately supported interaction across practices can generate coordination, reflection, and transformation (Bakker & Akkerman, 2019; Siliņa-Jasjukeviča et al., 2025; Stoffels et al., 2022). In founder-led institutions, however, learning may remain concentrated in the leader's biography and tacit knowledge, producing both adaptive strength and succession risk.

LKP Oase Academy offers a theoretically informative case. Established in Malang in 2002, it developed spa-therapy training in a field that initially lacked clear regulatory recognition and remained affected by public stigma. Over more than two decades, the institution faced market-formation challenges, reputational contestation, overlapping ministerial requirements, the incorporation of spa content into state-funded vocational secondary schools, the COVID-19 pandemic, organisational restructuring, and the founder's serious illness. Its continued operation should not be read simply as managerial success. The case instead enables examination of how learning, adaptation, and resilience were generated through repeated adversity in a small nonformal provider with limited resources and policy protection. This historically grounded focus responds to calls for VET research that is context-sensitive and attentive to the institutional conditions shaping provider action (Battisti et al., 2019; Wall & Bellamy, 2019; Zoellner, 2025).

Despite substantial scholarship on organisational learning, adaptation, resilience, and VET governance, their intersection remains underexamined in longitudinal studies of nonformal providers in developing economies. Adaptation reviews offer limited evidence from marginalised educational organisations; resilience research often emphasises conceptual clarification or cross-sectional measurement; and VET studies commonly focus on system reform, curricula, skills mismatch, or formal colleges rather than cumulative adversity-driven learning (Bano & Hou, 2026; Obadia Mugabirwe et al., 2025). This study addresses that gap by examining how actors at LKP Oase Academy interpreted adversity, converted experience into institutional knowledge, and adapted across twenty organisational phases from 2002 to 2025. It aims to identify the organisational learning generated through sustained adversity, explain how that learning enabled adaptation to different pressures, and clarify what the case reveals about the conditions confronting Indonesian nonformal VET providers. Accordingly, it asks: What forms of organisational learning emerged from sustained adversity? How did these processes enable organisational adaptation? What does the trajectory reveal about nonformal VET governance and provider support?

Method

This study adopted a qualitative phenomenological design to examine how institutional actors experienced, interpreted, and responded to prolonged organisational adversity. Phenomenology was appropriate because the inquiry concerned the meaning structures through which participants understood critical events rather than only the observable sequence of organisational changes. The

design combined a phenomenological attention to lived experience with an organisational sensemaking perspective, enabling analysis of how retrospective interpretations informed institutional action and learning (Moustakas, 1994; Thomas, 2021; vom Lehn, 2019; H. Williams, 2021). The unit of analysis was the organisational experience of learning and adaptation at LKP Oase Academy across its development from 2002 to 2025.

The research site was selected purposively using Indonesia's Ministry of Education official reference database (Pusdatin, 2023). Of 91 LKPs registered in Malang City, only six had operated for at least two decades. LKP Oase Academy met the analytical criteria because it had been founder-led since its establishment, remained active during fieldwork, operated as an independently established vocational provider rather than a franchise, and had experience placing graduates in international labour markets. It also operated in spa therapy, a vocational field affected by social stigma and regulatory ambiguity. The case was therefore selected not as a model of best practice, but as an information-rich setting for investigating the mechanisms and structural conditions of long-term nonformal VET survival.

Six informants were recruited through snowball sampling initiated with the founder-principal. As shown in Table 1, the sample included the founder-principal, an alumna co-operator, a senior instructor and administrator with seventeen years of institutional involvement, a partner-spa administrative officer, an alumni therapist, and an alumnus who worked as a vocational secondary-school teacher and coordinated student internships. This composition enabled the triangulation of managerial, instructional, administrative, partnership, employment, and alumni perspectives. Participants were selected because they had direct knowledge of one or more organisational phases and could explain both the events and the meanings attributed to them. Informant codes were used throughout the article to protect confidentiality.

Table 1. Research Informant Profiles

Code	Role	Affiliation	Data Contribution
DM	Founder and Principal	LKP Oase Academy	Primary: all twenty phases; policy navigation; international expansion
E	Co-operator and Alumna	Allura Spa / LKP Oase Academy	Post-merger management; financial governance
N	Senior Instructor and Admin (17 years)	LKP Oase Academy	Training operations; curriculum; daily institutional life
R	Administrative Officer	Allura Spa	Operational management; staffing; client relations
ALN	Alumni – Spa Therapist (Bali-based)	Regional spa employer	Graduate experience; international placement; professional identity
ALN-Gr	Alumni – SMK Teacher	Vocational Secondary School	Internship coordination; formal/nonformal VET boundary

Note. Informant codes are used throughout to preserve confidentiality.

Data were collected over fourteen months, from October 2023 to December 2024, through in-depth semi-structured interviews, observation, and documentary analysis. Interviews were conducted across multiple sessions, audio-recorded with informed consent, and transcribed

verbatim. The interview protocol explored participants' experiences of environmental pressure, their explanations of why events occurred, the institutional responses adopted, and the knowledge retained from those responses. Observations at the current Lowokwaru site and previous institutional locations supported interpretation of the spatial and material dimensions of organisational life. Documentary sources included curriculum files, licensing and government correspondence, National Occupational Competency Standard records, partnership agreements, certification documents, institutional procedures, archived media reports, and other records relevant to the chronology. The convergence of these sources provided both contextual depth and diachronic verification.

Analysis combined the interactive procedures described by Miles et al. (2014) of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing with phenomenological analysis. The researcher first applied epoché to make prior assumptions explicit, followed by horizontalisation of significant experiential statements and clustering of meaning units. Open coding generated descriptive labels for critical incidents and responses; focused coding grouped recurrent patterns; axial coding traced relationships among external pressures, organisational decisions, and learning outcomes; and theoretical coding connected the emergent patterns with organisational learning, adaptation, and resilience concepts. Twenty organisational phases were identified inductively. A new phase was established only when the evidence indicated a substantive shift in the dominant external pressure, the strategic or operational response, or the learning outcome institutionalised through routines, partnerships, structures, or standard operating procedures. The phases therefore represent analytically bounded episodes rather than equal chronological intervals.

Research trustworthiness was strengthened through source triangulation across six organisational roles and method triangulation across interviews, observations, and documents. Key informants reviewed condensed interpretations to verify factual accuracy and clarify ambiguous events. Thick description of the institutional and policy context supported transferability, while a documented coding trail and chronological evidence matrix supported dependability. Expert review and peer debriefing were used to challenge emerging interpretations and strengthen confirmability. Reflexively, the researcher remained external to LKP Oase Academy and entered the field after its most acute crises. This position reduced direct involvement in organisational conflicts but required continuing attention to retrospective reconstruction, founder-centred narratives, and the risk of interpreting institutional survival as inherently successful.

Result and Discussion

Result

The findings are presented at two interconnected levels. First, Table 2 reconstructs twenty analytically bounded phases in LKP Oase Academy's organisational trajectory from 2002 to 2025. Second, the phase-level evidence is synthesised into four empirical domains: market formation and reputational contestation; regulatory fragmentation; pandemic, illness, and institutional near-collapse; and cross-phase adaptive mechanisms.

Longitudinal Organisational Trajectory

Table 2. Twenty Organisational Phases of LKP Oase Academy (2002–2025)

Phase	Label	Period	Key Organisational Learning Generated
1	Ideation	2001–2002	Market needs analysis; mentor-based learning; industry survey
2	Legalisation and Support	2002	Regulatory navigation; curriculum co-development; Ministry contacts
3	Conflict with Founding Mentor	2002–2004	Governance independence; SKKNI formulation; relational boundaries
4	Early Management and Promotion	2003–2005	Market education; SMK partnership building; stigma management
5	International Expansion	2004–2006	International standards; documentary requirements; labour regulation
6	Business Competition and Defamation	2006–2007	Crisis communication; legal response; SOP development; reputation management
7	Training Cost vs Quality	2007–2012	Multidisciplinary curriculum; holistic 'job-ready' reconceptualisation
8	Dual-Ministry Strategy	2007–present	Regulatory ambidexterity; inter-ministerial navigation; legal clarification
9	Competition After Standardisation	2008–2015	Industry co-regulation; quality differentiation strategy
10	Cancer Diagnosis	2019–2020	Succession risk; remote leadership via technology; health-business balance
11	COVID-19 Impact and Salon Closures	2020	Crisis restructuring; pandemic adaptation; fraud detection
12	Collaboration with Allura Spa	2020–present	Merger learning; new business model; co-management structures
13	Task Division and Management	2020–2022	Collaborative structure; competency-based role assignment
14	Post-Merger Internal Conflict	2021–2022	Conflict pattern recognition; transparent communication systems
15	Knowledge Transfer to Allura	2021–present	SOP professionalisation; selective knowledge sharing strategy
16	Organisational Coaching	2022–present	Weekly briefing routines; job description; systematic governance
17	Internal Communication Reform	2022–present	Inclusive decision-making; financial transparency norms
18	Ambivalence About Separation	2023–present	Ethical obligation vs financial autonomy; institutional boundary setting
19	Declining Spa Visitors	2023–2024	Consumer behaviour analysis; political economy of discretionary spending
20	Declining LKP Enrolment	2023–present	Curriculum differentiation from SMK; short-course niche repositioning

The organisational history was reconstructed through iterative coding and triangulation rather than imposed through predetermined chronological categories. A new phase was identified

only when the evidence showed a substantive shift in at least one of three elements: the dominant external pressure, the institutional response or strategic orientation, or the learning outcome embedded in routines, structures, partnerships, or standard operating procedures. The phases are therefore analytically distinct episodes rather than equal time intervals.

The founder (DM) supplied the longitudinal account across all twenty phases, while other informants corroborated events within their periods of involvement. N confirmed curriculum development and operational changes; E and R verified merger governance, financial restructuring, and management transformation; and ALN and ALN-Gr confirmed graduate placement, curriculum implementation, and the boundary between nonformal and formal VET. Licensing records, curriculum files, partnership agreements, SKKNI documents, correspondence, and archived media reports were used to verify dates and organisational events wherever available.

Taken together, the phases reveal a discontinuous trajectory characterised by recurring cycles of disruption, interpretation, adaptive response, and partial stabilisation. Early phases generated market and regulatory knowledge, middle phases strengthened curriculum differentiation and institutional safeguards, and later phases produced partnership, governance, and operational restructuring. This cumulative trajectory provides the empirical basis for the cross-phase synthesis presented below.

Market Formation, Reputational Contestation, and Curriculum Displacement

When LKP Oase Academy was established in 2002, spa therapy was not yet widely recognised as a vocational category in Indonesia. The institution first had to create social legitimacy and learner demand by visiting schools, distributing information in remote districts, and explaining spa therapy as professional work rather than the stigmatised activity with which it was frequently associated. The founder described this formative period:

'I had to go from one SMK to another, entering and exiting, explaining everything one by one — because people did not yet know this field. Spa was still seen as something foreign, so I had to educate society that this was a promising field for their future.' (W/F1-a/DM/22/7/24)

This market-formation process generated practical knowledge about audience identification, public communication, school partnerships, and occupational legitimacy. The institution subsequently incorporated these lessons into its promotional practices and curriculum positioning, indicating that early adaptation involved changing both how the programme was communicated and how its institutional purpose was understood.

A major reputational crisis occurred in 2007 after Jawa Pos and Malang Pos reported allegations that the institution had withheld a graduate's diploma and placed graduates in establishments associated with covert sex work. Archived media reports documented the public controversy, while interviews described its operational and emotional effects.

The institution maintained that the diploma had been retained temporarily under a written tuition-payment agreement and that the placement allegation did not reflect its practices. Available evidence included the payment agreement and records of subsequent legal clarification. Because the documentary record primarily reflects institutional sources and retrospective accounts, this study does not adjudicate the original allegations; it examines the organisational consequences and learning generated by the episode. The founder recalled:

'I was accused of running a facility producing covert sex workers—truly devastating. I kept thinking about those words until I could not bear it anymore. Every parent who heard there was massage involved pulled their child out.' (W/BK6/DM/31/11/23)

The publicity intensified existing stigma, generated parental concern, and contributed to learner withdrawal. In response, the institution strengthened documentary record-keeping, formalised written agreements, developed crisis communication practices, and sought legal support from the Legal Aid Institution of Greater Malang. These measures were retained as organisational safeguards and later informed the institution's handling of external disputes.

By 2023, the institution faced declining enrolment as state-funded vocational secondary schools increasingly included spa content within beauty and wellness programmes. Participants perceived that prospective learners considered the formal-school curriculum sufficient, even when practical depth, industry integration, and professional placement differed from the LKP programme. The founder explained:

'The reason LKPs find it difficult to find learners is that LKP curricula have been adopted by SMKs — even if only superficially. Students who graduate from SMK think they have already learned it, when in fact their skills are not yet mature.' (W/BK20/DM/15/1/24)

The institutional response was to differentiate rather than replicate formal provision. LKP Oase Academy developed short courses for specific competency gaps, introduced in-house training at client workplaces, and pursued additional industry certification. The evidence indicates that curriculum displacement prompted a narrower market focus and a stronger emphasis on advanced practice and industry-linked credentials.

Regulatory Fragmentation and Dual-Ministry Navigation

At the institution's establishment in 2002, spa therapy had no clear category within the nonformal education framework. With guidance from a ministry-connected mentor, the programme was provisionally registered under skin care (tata kecantikan kulit). The founder later participated in formulating the National Occupational Competency Standard (SKKNI) for spa therapy and described this transition from regulatory recipient to contributor:

'Every time there was a meeting to formulate the SKKNI, I was appointed by the state to draft it — and I was one of the formulators.' (W/BK3/DM/2/10/23)

Participation in standard formulation produced detailed knowledge of licensing, competency standards, and ministerial procedures. This knowledge enabled the institution to align its curriculum with emerging national requirements and strengthen relationships with regulatory actors, although formal recognition and operational support remained limited.

The institution also had to navigate different certification responsibilities. Kemendikbud addressed educational competence, whereas Kemenaker addressed labour-market employability; both were relevant to international graduate placement. The institution responded by registering and operating under both ministries after seeking legal clarification from the Director of Vocational Education. The founder referred to this arrangement as a 'two-footed' strategy:

'I operate on two feet — under Kemendikbud and Kemenaker. I asked the Director of Vocational Education whether one institution could operate under two ministries. It turns out the law allows it. And so to this day, I walk on two feet.' (W/BK8/DM/8/12/23)

The dual-ministry arrangement generated regulatory, relational, and strategic learning but also transferred the burden of resolving policy ambiguity to the institution. Staff had to maintain

parallel documentation, interpret separate standards, and preserve relationships with both authorities in order to sustain educational legitimacy and labour-market relevance.

Pandemic, Illness, and Institutional Near-Collapse

The combined effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the founder's cancer treatment brought the institution close to closure in 2020. The founder underwent surgery on 18 March 2020 while continuing to manage severe operational disruption. By November 2020, all five Jakarta salon branches that had served as teaching factories and cross-subsidised the Malang training centre had closed permanently. The discovery of reception-related financial fraud in September 2020 further intensified the crisis.

Recovery developed through collaboration with Allura Spa, whose owner was an LKP alumna. Beginning in May 2020, the founder restructured the partner spa by introducing documented procedures, revising compensation to a commission-based system, and using digital marketing, including a three-month content-creator partnership costing IDR 3 million per month. By 2022, the organisations had merged operationally, and LKP training income contributed to Allura Spa's operating costs. The founder described the restructuring as follows:

'When I moved to Allura Spa, I changed everything — totally — from human resources, administration, to management. I know this is not easy, but if we want to move forward, the old inefficient system must be replaced with something better.' (W/BK15/DM/22/12/23)

The restructuring drew on the founder's previous international management experience and continuing self-directed learning from international spa networks. Knowledge was translated into standard operating procedures and shared with the partner team. The merger also generated new learning about task allocation, collaborative governance, financial transparency, post-merger conflict, and the boundaries of institutional identity, which became prominent in phases 13–18.

Cross-Phase Adaptive Mechanisms and Adversity-Driven Institutional Resilience

Across the twenty phases, the institution repeatedly converted external pressure into organisational knowledge, relationships, and capabilities. The term *ketahanmalangan* is used to describe this adversity-driven institutional resilience. It combines *ketahanan* (resilience or endurance) and *kemalangan* (adversity or misfortune) and is used descriptively rather than triumphantly: the persistence of adversity imposed substantial personal and institutional costs.

Three empirical properties characterised *ketahanmalangan*. First, crises generated specific knowledge, including crisis communication, regulatory navigation, partnership governance, and digital marketing. Second, part of this knowledge was institutionalised through procedures, records, routines, and organisational memory. Third, later responses drew on learning accumulated during earlier phases, producing a temporally layered capacity to continue operating under recurrent pressure.

The cross-phase analysis yielded three interconnected adaptive mechanisms. Curriculum and pedagogical repositioning reframed the programme around integrated and internationally oriented competence. Strategic market and partnership reconfiguration expanded regulatory, employer, and inter-organisational relationships. Financial and operational restructuring altered compensation, marketing, course formats, and governance arrangements. Table 3 links these mechanisms to the learning processes and institutional outcomes identified in the data.

The mechanisms did not operate independently. Curriculum differentiation created new market propositions; partnerships supplied knowledge and operational resources; and financial restructuring enabled continued training activity. Their interaction explains how the institution moved from short-term crisis response towards partially institutionalised adaptation.

Table 3. Organisational Learning–Adaptation Mechanisms at LKP Oase Academy

Adaptive Mechanism	Organisational Learning Process	Illustrative Institutional Outcome
Curriculum and Pedagogical Repositioning	Double-loop learning; absorptive capacity; knowledge from international spa schools (France, Switzerland)	Eight-month curriculum integrating medical knowledge, language (STIBA partnership), personality development (John Robert Power), and religious preparation; 80% practice/20% theory model
Strategic Market and Partnership Reconfiguration	Social capital mobilisation; dynamic capability sensing and seizing; inter-organisational learning	International labour market entry (Czech Republic, Kuwait, 2006); dual-ministry accreditation; merger-based COVID-19 recovery with Allura Spa
Financial and Operational Restructuring	Crisis learning; single-loop operational adjustment; institutionalised knowledge management (SOPs)	Commission-based compensation system; digital marketing adoption; short-course and in-house training diversification; content creator partnership

Discussion

The longitudinal trajectory indicates that organisational learning and adaptation at LKP Oase Academy developed through repeated cycles of disruption, interpretation, response, and institutionalisation rather than through a linear growth process. Across the twenty phases, the institution did not simply react to isolated events; it progressively accumulated regulatory knowledge, reputational safeguards, partnership routines, curriculum expertise, and operational procedures. This pattern supports the view that organisational adaptation consists of intentional actions directed at reducing misalignment with changing economic and institutional environments (Sarta et al., 2021). It also extends evidence that organisational learning and adaptability are interdependent, because the capacity to respond to later crises was partly constituted by knowledge generated during earlier episodes (Eriksson & Hallberg, 2022; Mutebi et al., 2022; Rupčić, 2023). In this case, learning was not an optional improvement strategy but a condition of continued operation.

The first comparative insight concerns organisational resilience. Duchek (2020) conceptualises resilience as a process comprising anticipation, coping, and adaptation, while Hillmann & Guenther (2021) emphasise the mobilisation of resources and capabilities to maintain function, recover, and learn. The LKP Oase Academy case is consistent with these process-based accounts but shows that the stages were neither orderly nor fully anticipatory. Market stigma, reputational attack, policy ambiguity, illness, and pandemic disruption frequently overlapped, requiring the institution to cope and adapt before it could consolidate learning. This finding also corresponds with Gover & Duxbury (2018) emphasis on the organisational conditions that enable or inhibit resilience. However, the present study adds a temporal explanation: capabilities became available because prior crises had been converted into documentation, relationships, routines, and interpretive frames. Resilience was therefore cumulative and historically produced, not merely activated at the moment of disruption.

The second comparative insight concerns organisational learning under crisis. Eriksson & Hallberg (2022) argue that crisis management can become a learning system when experience is transferred across crisis episodes, and Brandi & Christensen (2018) show that sustainable organisational learning requires deliberate arrangements through which individual experience becomes organisational practice. The findings demonstrate both processes. The reputational crisis produced written agreements and documentary safeguards; regulatory uncertainty generated ministerial knowledge and a dual-registration strategy; and pandemic-related collapse led to revised compensation, digital marketing, and partnership governance. These outcomes also align with Rupčić (2023) argument that learning capability depends on absorptive capacity, ambidexterity, and a culture that can convert environmental signals into action. Yet the evidence reveals a vulnerability: much of this learning remained dependent on the founder's memory, networks, and international experience. Institutionalisation through standard operating procedures reduced, but did not eliminate, this founder dependence.

The third comparative insight relates to double-loop learning and resource reconfiguration. B. K. Williams & Brown (2018) describe double-loop learning as the revision of governing assumptions when incremental correction is no longer sufficient. At LKP Oase Academy, curriculum and pedagogical repositioning went beyond adjusting individual course components. The institution reconceived its purpose from delivering technical spa skills to preparing internationally employable practitioners through integrated technical, linguistic, personal, and cultural preparation. Strategic market and partnership reconfiguration similarly reflected the intentional reorganisation of resources and relationships associated with adaptation and dynamic capabilities (Mutebi et al., 2022; Sarta et al., 2021). The move towards short courses, workplace-based provision, dual-ministry navigation, and merger-based recovery also resembles market-shaping processes in which organisations seek to influence stakeholder expectations and the structure of exchange rather than passively accept existing demand (Nenonen et al., 2024).

The fourth comparative insight concerns the structural position of nonformal VET. Current VET scholarship cautions against interpreting provider performance solely as a response to skills mismatch and calls for attention to institutional power, social justice, and historically constituted governance relationships (McGrath et al., 2022; McGrath & Yamada, 2023; Soliman, 2025). The present findings reinforce this critique. The institution had to help construct a vocational category, negotiate overlapping ministerial authority, defend the legitimacy of a stigmatised occupation, and respond when state-funded vocational schools incorporated similar curricula. These were not merely competitive challenges. They reveal a system that depended on nonformal innovation while offering limited protection, coordination, or recognition. In this respect, the institution's survival should not be romanticised: the need for extraordinary adaptation is itself evidence of structural precarity. This interpretation is consistent with calls to reframe VET around sustainable and contextually responsive skills ecosystems rather than isolated providers competing for learners.

The fifth comparative insight involves learning across organisational boundaries. Oonk et al. (2022) demonstrate that boundary-crossing learning can stimulate reflection and transformation when actors engage deliberately across different practices. LKP Oase Academy's relationships with government agencies, employers, international spa schools, alumni, vocational secondary schools, and Allura Spa produced similar learning opportunities. The institution acquired regulatory knowledge, translated international standards into local curriculum, and used partnership

arrangements to preserve operational continuity. However, boundary crossing also created tensions concerning knowledge ownership, dependency, financial transparency, and institutional identity. The post-merger phases therefore show that inter-organisational learning is not automatically collaborative or equitable. It requires explicit governance, role clarity, communication routines, and safeguards for institutional knowledge, consistent with evidence that networks enhance adaptability only when learning processes and responsibilities are sufficiently coordinated (Brandi & Christensen, 2018; Mutebi et al., 2022; Rupčić, 2023).

The principal novelty of this study is the concept of *ketahanmalangan*, defined here as adversity-driven institutional resilience generated cumulatively through repeated cycles of organisational learning. The concept differs from resilience understood primarily as recovery because it emphasises the production and institutionalisation of knowledge through adversity. It also differs from individual psychological resilience because its empirical indicators include organisational routines, regulatory competence, partnership structures, curriculum repositioning, and documentary memory. *Ketahanmalangan* has three interconnected properties: it is temporally cumulative, because later responses draw on earlier crises; biographically mediated, because the founder's experience and learning substantially shaped institutional capability; and structurally critical, because the adversity requiring resilience was produced partly by policy incoherence, market marginalisation, and social stigma. The concept therefore complements process-based resilience models (Duchek, 2020; Hillmann & Guenther, 2021) by explaining how institutional capability may be generated under conditions where adversity is persistent rather than exceptional.

The findings have implications for policy and institutional practice. At the policy level, clearer coordination between education and labour authorities is required so that nonformal providers do not independently bear the costs of reconciling certification systems. Formal and nonformal VET should be designed as complementary components of a skills ecosystem, with mechanisms for curriculum partnership, credit recognition, referral, and industry collaboration rather than simple programme substitution. Support frameworks should also recognise the developmental role of specialist nonformal providers in emerging occupations and help them strengthen digital infrastructure, quality assurance, and professional legitimacy. At the institutional level, founder-led providers should convert tacit knowledge into accessible procedures, distribute external relationships across staff, establish succession plans, and review partnership governance regularly. The teaching-factory arrangement may support both authentic learning and revenue diversification, but its educational and financial functions need transparent boundaries.

Several limitations qualify these interpretations. The single-institution design offers longitudinal depth but does not establish that the identified mechanisms operate similarly across Indonesian LKPs or other national systems. The six informants provided role diversity, yet the founder contributed the most extensive longitudinal account, creating a risk that organisational history was interpreted disproportionately through a founder-centred narrative. Retrospective interviews were also vulnerable to selective memory and post hoc meaning construction, although documentary and cross-informant triangulation reduced this risk. Documentary coverage varied across the twenty phases, and the study did not independently verify every contested public allegation. Finally, *ketahanmalangan* is an empirically generated concept whose scope conditions require further testing. Comparative longitudinal studies across vocational fields and regions, research incorporating regulators and competing providers, and mixed-method investigations of

organisational learning capability would help assess its transferability and distinguish adversity-driven learning from routine adaptation.

Conclusion

This study examined how organisational learning and adaptation unfolded across twenty organisational phases at LKP Oase Academy, a nonformal spa-therapy training provider in Malang, Indonesia. The phenomenological analysis showed that sustained operation did not result from a single resilient characteristic, but from repeated cycles in which environmental pressure was interpreted, addressed, and converted into institutional knowledge. Three mechanisms structured this process: curriculum and pedagogical repositioning, strategic market and partnership reconfiguration, and financial and operational restructuring. Through these mechanisms, the institution responded to occupational stigma, reputational contestation, regulatory fragmentation, curriculum displacement, pandemic disruption, and the founder's illness by developing new curricula, ministerial knowledge, documentary safeguards, partnership arrangements, and operational procedures. The study's principal theoretical contribution is *ketahanmalangan*, conceptualised as adversity-driven institutional resilience that accumulates historically, is mediated by founder biography, and becomes embedded in organisational routines and relationships. This concept highlights that resilience may generate capability through adversity while simultaneously revealing the structural conditions that make exceptional resilience necessary. Policy implications include stronger coordination between education and labour authorities, greater complementarity between formal and nonformal VET, and institutional support for specialist providers operating in emerging or stigmatised occupations. For practice, founder-led organisations should distribute external relationships, document tacit knowledge, strengthen succession planning, and establish transparent partnership governance. The conclusions remain bounded by the single-case design, six-informant sample, retrospective accounts, uneven documentary coverage, and founder-centred evidence. Comparative longitudinal and mixed-method studies across regions, vocational fields, and stakeholder groups are needed to test the transferability and scope conditions of *ketahanmalangan*.

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